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THE

WORKS

OF

ROBERT HALL, A.M.

WITH

A MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE,

BY

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AND

A CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF HIS CHARACTER AND WRITINGS,

BY JOHN FOSTER,

AUTHOR OF "ESSAYS ON DECISION OF CHARACTER," ETC.

33696
27/5/91

VOL. VI.

SERMONS.—MISCELLANEOUS PIECES.—INDEX.

LONDON:

HENRY G. BOHN, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

M.DCCC.XLVI.

LONDON:
J. HADDON, PRINTER, CASTLE STREET, FINSBURY.

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SERMONS.

I.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

Isaiah xxxi. 3.—*The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit.**

[PREACHED AT CAMBRIDGE, APRIL 14, 1822, AND AT BRISTOL IN AUGUST, 1824.]

Among the sins to which the ancient Israelites were addicted, one of the most prevailing was a disposition, in seasons of invasion or calamity, to place confidence in the power of surrounding nations, and to seek the assistance of their sovereigns instead of trusting in the living God. By this they frequently incurred divine chastisement, and in some instances even divine dereliction. Egypt, being the largest monarchy in their immediate neighbourhood, was frequently their refuge in times of distress and difficulty. Their guilt in thus departing from God was greatly aggravated, on account of the intimate relation which he sustained to them as their king and sovereign, by virtue of which he had engaged to protect them by his mighty power so long as they adhered to his service and allegiance; while the frequent manifestation of his uncontrollable dominion over the natural world, displayed in the signal deliverances he had wrought for them, rendered the transfer of their confidence from him to "an arm of flesh," equally

* Printed from the Notes of Joshua Wilson, Esq. See Vol. V. pp. 113—118, for Mr. Hall's brief notes of the same sermon.

criminal and foolish. "Woe to them," saith the prophet, "that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!"* Then, in a strain of pointed irony, he severely reproves their preference, by reminding them that God possessed those qualities of foresight and force, which justified entire dependence; and that whatever grounds for confidence they fancied to exist in the character of the Egyptian potentate, were found in a degree infinitely greater in that of the Almighty—"Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: (alluding to the conduct of Pharaoh, who had often broken the promises and violated the engagements he had made) but will arise against the house of the evil-doers, and against the help of them that work iniquity:" He will not only rise against the workers of iniquity, but against their helpers also; and will cause them all to fail together; "for the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit."

In these words we are reminded of an important and infinite disparity between God and man; arising from a great peculiarity in the character of the former, which rendered the Egyptian monarch and his cavalry infinitely inferior to Him in power, and all those other qualities which entitle the possessor of them to confidence and trust.

It is my design to suggest to you some of those views of the character of the Supreme Being, inseparably connected with the spirituality of his nature, in which he stands contrasted with all other beings whatsoever.

I. The spirituality of the Deity is intimately connected with the possession of that infinite, unlimited power, which renders him the proper object of entire confidence.

There is a vulgar prejudice in favour of matter and against spirit, as if the former were possessed of great force, while the latter is only invested with a feeble degree of energy. This prejudice arises from our mis-

* Isaiah xxxi. 1.

taking secondary and remote effects for causes, allowing them therefore to terminate our view, instead of ascending from those laws of nature which God has established to himself, the supreme cause. Hence, in contemplating the operations of the elements of nature in producing great and important changes, we are apt to think of matter, and of matter in its most gross and palpable form. These changes certainly indicate the existence of great power, which, at the first view, we are apt to connect with the material part of the system. We are also practically acquainted with the mechanical forces, and, seeing that these are exerted through the medium of matter, we are thence led to suppose that to be the source of power. We find that we are incapable of operating on matter, of moving even an atom by a mere act of our will; a material medium is necessary to enable us to produce the slightest change on the objects of nature; and, if a material substance is brought to bear upon them, the most important effects are produced. We have no power of operating on the objects immediately around us, but by means of our bodies; and the changes that take place are always connected with certain motions in them, which enable us to come into contact with the visible world. Hence we are apt to terminate our ideas of power in matter. But in these cases it is *mind*, and mind alone, which is the seat of power. The influence which our bodies have upon other bodies, whereby their relative position is changed, is merely a secondary effect—an effect of that act of will which produces the motion of our bodies. The power by which all changes are effected through the instrumentality of the body, resides immediately in the mind. It is that mysterious principle called Will, which the Divine Being has invested with a control over the various parts of our bodies; nor have we power to alter the state of a single external thing, in the least degree, except by means of volition, which is a mental power, operating immediately upon the body. No other account can be given of this capacity, but that the Divine Being has endowed us with instantaneous control over the

muscular parts of our bodies. We can conceive nothing intermediate between the act of the will and the movement of the muscles. So complete indeed is the dominion of mind over matter, that the moment we will a certain motion in the body, it takes place, and thus only are we enabled to effect changes in the system of surrounding nature. We probably derive our idea of power from the changes we see effected in this manner; but all these changes resolve themselves into acts of the will. It is therefore plain that power resides in the *mind*, and that matter is in these respects only the instrument of mind, which in the first instance acts, which alone properly acts, and becomes the author of all the subsequent changes. Mind, indeed, to a certain extent and within a certain sphere, is absolute power; and whatever motions it wills, instantly take place. Though we are far from supposing for a moment that the Divine Being is the soul of the universe, or that he bears the same relation to the visible world as the soul does to the body —a notion replete with absurdity and impiety; yet the power which the mind exerts over the whole of our corporeal system, may afford an apt illustration of that control which the Deity exercises over the universe. We will a certain motion in the muscles of our body, and immediately it takes place; nothing is perceived to intervene between the act of the will and the subsequent motion. By the mysterious constitution of our nature we are capable from a very early period of life, of putting into instantaneous motion the right set of muscles for producing a certain change; but nothing intervenes between the volition and the change. In vain do we inquire how this takes place, because we can find nothing which comes between the operation of the will and the change produced in our corporeal frame.

Conceive the Divine Being as a spirit, having the same dominion over the invisible universe, in every part of space, as that which our minds possess over every portion of our bodies; and then you will perceive, faintly at least, the origin of that power, the indications of which are so visible throughout the universe. He has only to

will the most important changes, and they are instantly accomplished. "He speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast." "He said, Let there be light, and there was light." No causes intervene between the volition and the change which ensues; for in the Deity to will is to effect. Being an infinite Spirit, and coming into immediate contact with all parts of the universe, he is capable, by a mere act of will, of effecting all possible changes in the same manner, but in an infinitely higher degree, as we are capable, by an act of our will, of causing certain motions in the muscular parts of our body, and thus producing changes in the external objects around us.

We shall find it impossible to give any account of innumerable changes which are continually taking place in the visible world, without tracing them up to mind. There cannot be a clearer proof of a Deity, than the existence of motion. This evidently appears not to be essential to matter, because we see a very great portion of the material universe without it. Not being, therefore, an original state of matter, but merely an incident, it must be an effect. But since matter, not being intelligent, cannot be the cause of its own motion—and yet we cannot conceive of any atom beginning to move with out a cause—that cause must be found out of itself. Whatever may be the nearest cause, or the number of secondary causes; though innumerable portions of matter may be reciprocally or successively moved; though the series of links in the chain through which motion is propagated may be indefinitely multiplied; we must, in order to arrive at the origin of these various phenomena, ascend to mind, terminate our inquiries in spirit; nor can we account for the beginning, much less for the continuance and extension of motion, unless we trace it to the will of that Being, who is the cause of all causes—the great original mover in the universe. Power is, therefore, the attribute of mind; instrumentality that of body. When we read, in the Old Testament, of the most exalted achievements ascribed to angelic spirits, we cannot suppose that it is owing to any gross materialism

which they possess; on the contrary, they have no bodies capable of being investigated by our senses; and in proportion as they are more attenuated, do they possess greater power. We have reason to believe that all finite minds are under the direction of the Supreme Power, who, without destroying their accountability or interfering with their free agency, makes all their operations subservient to the accomplishment of his counsels. Hence all opposition to the Deity is beautifully represented by Isaiah, as if the instrument should rebel against him that wields it, as if "the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up;" or "the staff should lift up itself against him that is no wood."* All created beings, in this respect, are but instruments in the hand of the Deity, whose will is sovereign over them.

The Divine Being, as the great Father of spirits, combines within himself all the separate energies found in the universe. He is the source, origin, and fountain of all power diffused through creation. The very minds which he has formed are kept in mysterious subordination, and can never overstep the bounds he has assigned them. "Once have I heard this, that power belongs unto God."

II. The spirituality of God stands in close and intimate connexion with his invisibility, or that property by which he is completely removed from the notice of our senses, especially that of sight.

This is one of the perfections claimed by him in sacred writ, one of the attributes which the Scriptures perpetually ascribe to him. He is styled by the apostle Paul the "King eternal, immortal, *invisible*."—"the blessed and only Potentate,"—"*whom no man hath seen, nor can see.*"† "*No man*," said our Saviour, "*hath seen the Father at any time.*" He is the *invisible God*. Were he the object of sight, he must be limited. Whatever manifestations he may make of himself, it is utterly impossible that his essence, or He himself, should ever be the object of our corporeal sensations; for these extend

* Isaiah x. 15; Bishop Lowth's translation. † 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16.

only to visible and sensible objects. He cannot therefore be represented to the human imagination, or be figured out by any art or skill of man; agreeably to the sublimest discourse of the apostle to the Athenians.* He was pleased, indeed, in former times, to afford to his ancient people in the wilderness, and afterwards in the tabernacle and the temple, some outward tokens of his presence, but these were not any display of his essence. Moses, when warning the people against forming any graven image, or picture of the Deity, expressly declares that they "saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto them in Horeb."† The third commandment contains an express injunction against exhibiting any representation of the Deity to the eyes of mankind. Hence we may perceive the great impiety of those sects of christians, in different parts of the world, especially of the church of Rome, who have attempted to paint and figure out the persons of the Trinity, in express contradiction to this divine edict, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, or the likeness"‡ &c. The worship of that erroneous and idolatrous church consists very much in acts of homage paid to these external representations; and, though her advocates profess that they are merely required as media, yet we cannot but fear, that the view is too often terminated upon them, and the Divine Being thus supplanted of that spiritual worship which he claims in consequence of being a spirit. We need not wonder, therefore, at the pains taken by that church to suppress the second commandment: entirely omitting that precept in some of her formularies, and dividing another commandment into two to make up the number ten. The necessary effect of any attempt to exhibit the Deity to the human senses, by pictures or images, must be to degrade to an incalculable degree, our conceptions of him; partly as it circumscribes what is unlimited, and partly as it is adapted to mingle the passions and affections of the human nature with our conception of the Divine. The notion of an Infinite

* Acts xvii. 24—29. † Deut. iv. 15. ‡ Exod. xx. 4, 5.

Being is utterly inconsistent with any outward figure or shape, which would confine, to a certain determinate portion of space, Him who declares of himself, "*Do not I fill heaven and earth?*" and thus limit the infinite presence and majesty of the great Eternal. No sooner do men attempt to make the Deity an object of their senses, than they begin to think him altogether such an one as themselves. Descending from the high and holy place where the Divine Being dwells, the mind, accustomed to contemplate him under a visible form, gradually sinks lower and lower in approximation to its own level, till at last men come to conceive of him as compassed with infirmities like themselves. Hence, where such representations of Deity have prevailed, images of other beings, more suited to their gross taste, have been introduced; at first angels; but at length, by a natural process, the chief place in their religious affections has become occupied by the Virgin Mary, and other saints of inferior character, who have received much greater abundance of these marks of devotion and homage than the Supreme Being himself. So impossible is it for the church of Rome, to purge itself from the charge of that idolatry which the Scriptures most severely denounce. Were there no other reason to deter persons from the communion of that church, her profane tampering with the very elements of devotion, and poisoning the first principles of religion, were alone sufficient to inspire all true christians with the utmost abhorrence. For, the same authority which forbids the transfer of worship from a right to a wrong object, also stigmatizes all deviation from the prescribed standard, in the manner of worshipping the Divine Being himself. Could we see nothing of a tendency to lead on to greater abominations in this "chamber of imagery," till it terminate in hero and idol worship, nay, in the worship of wood and stone, it is expressly forbidden; and this prohibition alone is sufficient to stamp it with the character of impiety.

III. That God is a spirit, and not flesh, is inseparably connected with his immensity and omnipresence, or the capacity of being present in all parts of his creation.

Omnipresence is an attribute which both reason and scripture teach us to ascribe to the Deity, and which he repeatedly assumes to himself: "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."* "Whither," says the Psalmist, "shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."† We are taught to believe that the essence of the Divine Being is diffused over all space—that there is not an atom existing in its boundless extent which he does not fill with his presence and energy. Were his nature material this could not be, for the following reasons:—

1. It is necessary that matter should have some *figure*, without which we cannot even conceive it to exist, whether we regard it as a whole, and include the aggregate of material substances, or look at the several portions of which that aggregate consists, and contemplate its parts as having a separate existence. Figure seems essential to the conception of all matter; but that which has any assignable figure must be circumscribed within a certain outline; there must, then, be some point of space where it terminates, and where vacuity begins, consequently it must be limited. To conceive, therefore, of the Divine Being as material, would be to involve ourselves in absurdity; for matter infinitely extended implies a contradiction, by uniting two opposite and irreconcilable suppositions.

2. If matter were unlimited there would be no possi-

* Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. † Ps. cxxxix. 7—12.

bility of motion; but this is a supposition contrary to fact and experience; for we perceive that motion every where exists. It is obvious that there could be no motion unless there were some space not previously occupied by body. In a perfect plenum, motion would be impossible, because there would be no possibility of conceiving that space into which the first moving body might pass.

3. If the Divine Being were material, it would be impossible that he should be infinite in his essence, fill all space, penetrate all substances, pervade all minds; because, on that supposition, he would render impossible the co-existence of created beings. We cannot conceive of two portions of matter occupying the same part of space. Were the Deity therefore material, he must exclude all other matter from the space he occupies; and since he is infinite, that exclusion must be perfect and entire: but this, being contrary to physical fact, is certainly contrary to intellectual truth. Whereas God, being a spirit, subsists in a totally different manner from all material substances; his manner of existence being altogether peculiar to himself, and such as we cannot adequately conceive. It follows, however, that any material substance and the Divine Being are capable of being present in the same place, at the same time, without destroying each other's properties and attributes. Such a Being also can be equally present at one and the same moment in innumerable myriads of worlds, and to all parts of the universe . . . .

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The Infinite Spirit is present with every part of his creation, as intimately as the soul of man is present throughout all the parts of that corporeal substance which it animates and sustains. His essence is diffused over all space. He is intimately present with all his creatures, as intimately as they are to themselves; is perfectly acquainted with the thoughts of all intelligent beings; unites himself with the very constitution of their nature. They exist within the grasp

of his omnipotence, within the perpetual comprehension of his presence, within the sphere of his energy, and the light of his countenance. "In him they live, and move, and have their being." We frequently speak of God dwelling in the world, by the manifestations of his power and providence; but it may with equal truth be said, that the world dwells in God; all creatures being surrounded by his presence, and enclosed in his essence. We cannot for a moment conceive of such a being as separated from any part of the universe, or point of space: all creatures, spiritual and material, subsist in Him who, maintaining his own separate existence distinct from the external world, exercises absolute universal dominion over all the beings he has formed. This particular property of his nature, this peculiar mode of his existence, renders him capable of being the all-comprehending God, of holding in his own hand all the innumerable creatures he has formed.

IV. Because God is a spirit, and not flesh, he is possessed of infinite wisdom and intelligence.

This seems to be a necessary property of that Being, who, himself unbounded and filling all things, must be present to all his creatures at all times, with the same plenitude of perfection as at the very instant of their creation. We cannot conceive for a moment of any interval betwixt him and them, which might exclude them from his view. They must ever be in immediate contact with him, and the objects of his perpetual vision. He is not obliged to change his place in order to observe and take cognizance of them. This presence of God with his creatures being infinite and eternal, his infinite acquaintance with them seems to be a necessary consequence. He that formed all things does not quit any portion of his vast empire when he retires to the "high and secret place of his sanctuary." He needs not to vary his position towards his creatures, in order to obtain a more advantageous situation, or catch the benefit of changing lights, for the purpose of making a more accurate scrutiny of any of them. Every one is as much within his survey at one moment as at another; he is

continually present to them, with the same plenitude of power as that which was exerted in their formation out of nothing. Every movement, both of spirit and matter, is performed "in him," and must therefore be immediately within his notice. It is impossible that any thing should elude or escape the light of his countenance, or that any darkness should cover, from his view, those beings which he has created. Hence, he is perfectly acquainted with the thoughts of all hearts, and the secret springs of all the actions of his rational, intelligent creatures. We are obliged to judge of men's character by their actions; he judges of their actions by their motives: we can only trace the streams, and by them judge of the fountain whence they proceed; he penetrates the hidden spring and source: we form a few conjectures of what is passing in man, by the outward exhibitions of his conduct; he, in consequence of the knowledge he possesses of the very constitution of those beings who have been called into existence by his divine power, detects at once the secret springs of all their actions.—"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh at the heart." He qualifies all our actions by immediate attention to the causes whence they proceed: the *motive* is that which determines the action in his sight, and his judgement is always according to truth. "By him actions are weighed." While we are continually liable to be mistaken, and our judgements and censures, often rash and misplaced, are always uncertain; his eye pierces the thickest shades of darkness. The gloom of midnight and the splendour of noon are only distinctions with respect to us; in regard to him, there is no difference: "With him the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to him." There can be no folly therefore so great as for a creature to attempt to conceal himself from the inspection and scrutiny of his Maker. He is within us: "in him we live, and move, and have our being." We need no other proof that he knows the secrets of the heart, than that he is present with its most hidden recesses. Hence, in the Psalm already referred to, the

Psalmist infers his infinite cognizance of his creatures, from the fact of his incessant and intimate presence with them. The infinite knowledge which God has of his works, is indeed inseparably connected with this part of his character. As the Infinite Spirit—the great Father of spirits—he is the source of all the intelligence and wisdom which exist in created spirits. He must be perfectly acquainted with all the operations and results of all other minds, since he has constituted them, and they are entirely the effect of his own intelligence and wisdom. When the heathen world lost sight of the spirituality of God, they also lost sight of his omniscience; and, after gradually sinking lower in proportion as they receded farther from that view of his character, their notions of him became at length so debased, that they invested him with a corporeal form. The spirituality of the divine nature, having been attested by the Saviour, and made one of the principles of his religion, has raised the conceptions of the human mind far beyond what the greatest philosophers could previously attain; and enabled children to surpass, in both spiritual and intellectual illumination, the sages of pagan antiquity.

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V. The doctrine of the spirituality of the divine nature establishes a most intimate relation between him and all his intelligent creatures: it becomes a bond of the most subtile union between himself and the intellectual part of the creation.

He stands in close and intimate relation to all creatures: their dependence on him is absolute, their subjection to him constant and incessant; but in a special manner is he the Father of spirits. The relation between father and child is very intimate; but that between God and man is much more so. An earthly parent is but the instrument; God is the author of our existence: one is the father of the flesh; the other of the spirit. In proportion as the spirit is the most important part of human nature, this relation which we sustain to God is most essential, interesting, and extensive. The body connects us with the material universe around us; the

soul connects us immediately with the Deity. At death, the body returns to the earth, its native element; "the spirit returns to God that gave it." The body has a tendency to separate us from God, by the dissimilarity of its nature; the soul, on the contrary, unites us again to him, by means of those principles and faculties which, though infinitely inferior, are of a character congenial with his own. The body is the production of God, the soul is his image. . . . . .

To estrange ourselves from God is therefore to be guilty of a new and most enormous kind of offence: it is forgetting our proper parent, the author of our being, the very source of our existence. To love him, to seek union with him in the closest manner possible, is to return to our proper original—to seek Him from whom all our powers are derived, and by whom alone they can be sustained in time, and must be consummated and completed in eternity. If you were to see a person manifest no desire for the presence of an earthly parent, you would be shocked at the spectacle, and would be ready to represent him as a prodigy of ingratitude. How much more would it affect a well-constituted mind to behold a creature seeking estrangement from his Heavenly Parent—living in forgetfulness of Him. This would appear matter of the greatest astonishment, were men to withdraw themselves from sensible objects, and retire into their own minds, for the purpose of serious reflection. The prophet calls on heaven and earth to sympathize with him in this emotion: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."*

* * * * *

VI. The spirituality of the divine nature renders him capable of the exalted prerogative of being the satisfying portion, the supreme good, of all intelligent beings.

It is in consequence of being a spirit, that he is properly fitted to be the Supreme Good; not merely the

* Isaiah i. 2.

dispenser of those outward benefits which gratify the corporeal appetites, and sustain our transitory state in this world; not only the author, but the immediate source, the very element of our happiness—in consequence of those properties of his nature which are congenial with our own. Many are willing to acknowledge their dependence on the power and providence of God for those good things, the possession of which the world calls happiness, such as riches, honours, pleasures; they expect to be made happy by means of his influence over inferior creatures, exerted in putting things in a train for that purpose. But the devout man ascends to God himself, as the source and spring of happiness, in the contemplation of whom, and in whose friendship and love, consists eternal life: he regards him as the highest good, the source of felicity to the intelligent universe, the very principle of good. The Psalmist recognized the Divine Being under this character, and he has been so recognized by the faithful in every age and every nation; "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him."* We find holy men casting their eyes round upon all that is in heaven and on earth . . . . then collecting all into one great aggregate, and solemnly relinquishing the whole, trampling it in the dust, in order to ascend to God, and rest in his love. "Whom," says the Psalmist, "have I in heaven but *thee*, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee; my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever. My soul thirsteth for God, my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." To know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent, this, this is life eternal. The Divine Being not only sustains towards us the character of a governor, ruling our wills by his holy law, but is also the chief object of our affections; and we never know him aright till we feel thus towards him; till we obey him from the heart, perceiving in him

* Lam. iii. 24, 25. Psalm lxxiii. 25, 26.

that which is suited to the nature of our immortal minds, and resting in him as our eternal and unchanging portion. If you do not ascend as high as this, you will never find any rest for your soul, you will wander through eternity restless and unsatisfied: "The height will say, It is not in me; and the depth, It is not in me;" and every voice will answer us with scorn unless we listen to that which now issues from the secret presence of the Almighty: "Acquaint thyself with *me*, and be at peace." All that we can derive from creatures is partial, scanty, limited, and precarious; and even that is the effect of his power, the fruit of his munificence: but with Him is the fountain of life, "in his presence is fulness of joy, at his right hand are pleasures for evermore." He manifests himself to his people, as he does not to the world. The communion they enjoy with the Father of their spirits, forms an essential part of the experience of all real christians. How intimately this is connected with the spirituality of the divine nature will appear, if you consider a few things which naturally arise from a view of the present subject.

1. That which constitutes the felicity of the mind must be something out of it. Whoever retires into his own mind for happiness, will soon find himself miserable; he will feel imprisoned till he is permitted to go forth and unite himself in affection and confidence to something out of himself. Hence those who are most insulated, and cut off from all contact with others, are styled, by way of distinction, *misers*, and are truly the most miserable of men. There cannot be a greater picture of abject wretchedness, than a man, entirely confined to himself, possessing none of those sensibilities which attach mind to mind, and heart to heart—a stranger to that reciprocation of feeling and affection between kindred minds, which is the very balm of life. But where shall we find, out of ourselves, that which is not, like ourselves, changing, uncertain, and liable to decay, except in God, the Eternal Spirit, who, being essentially incorruptible and immortal, is qualified to be the everlasting, inexhaustible spring of satisfaction to all

his intelligent creatures? In fellowship with him may be enjoyed to the uttermost all that is tender and delightful in the emotions which friendship is adapted to inspire, at the same time that in the contemplation of all those great and excellent qualities which elevate and dignify his character, may be awakened the awe which vastness and power are fitted to excite; and both together may well be supposed capable of filling the mind with a calm and peaceful rapture, to eternity. If the friendship of a fellow-creature be capable of affording such exquisite delight, how divine a delectation must flow from union of heart with the Deity!

2. He who can always confer happiness on another being must be superior to that being. To be the source of happiness is the highest prerogative, the greatest pre-eminence, that one being can possess over another; it is, in fact, to be his God. It is plain that we must look higher than ourselves, and trust to the intervention of a power greatly superior to our own, for the source and perpetuity of our happiness. Hence the Psalmist prays: "When my heart is overwhelmed within me, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." The Divine Being possesses this qualification in the highest degree; he is the Infinite Spirit;—to him alone it belongs to say to any created being, "I will be thy God." . . . . . . He only is capable of bestowing and assuring true, permanent, unchanging felicity, at all periods, and through all duration; of doing, in short, "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." The earth in this respect with all its riches is indigent; even the splendour of immortality is dark, as to any power capable of guiding man to happiness, independently of the Great Eternal. It belongs to him as the Father of Spirits; for he alone possesses that power and dominion over all beings which is necessary in order to render him the portion and happiness of his people.

3. That in which the happiness of a rational and mental creature consists must be congenial to the nature of that creature. The body may be made happy by cor-

poreal objects, adapted to gratify its senses; mind can never be made happy except by mental objects. It rejects with contempt and disdain all sensible delights as its portion. The understanding must be satisfied with the light of truth, or we cannot, as rational creatures, be free from disquietude; the affections must be satisfied in the lovely qualities of character, before the heart can find rest. Where these requisites are wanting, men often languish in the midst of plenty; though surrounded by the means of enjoyment, cast a lingering, despairing view around; and sometimes feel disposed to envy those inferior creatures which are placed beneath the level of rationality. But the mental and spiritual excellencies and perfections requisite to constitute the adequate portion of mental and spiritual beings, can only be found in God, who must therefore be the proper good of a thinking creature.

4. That which forms the principle of our felicity must be something that is capable of communicating itself to us. Creatures solely material are entirely incapable of doing this. Sensual pleasures can never reach our interior nature: they are not sufficiently subtile to constitute the source of delight to the mind; they touch only the grosser elements of our susceptibility, and do not penetrate sufficiently deep to be the proper basis of our enjoyment. But God, as he is a spirit, is capable of communicating himself to the spirits of his rational creatures. Spirit naturally comes into contact with spirit; and this communication of himself is infinitely easy to the Divine Being. He can manifest himself to the hearts of his people, disclose the glory of his name to them more and more, open perpetually fresh views of his character, give them fresh sensations of ineffable delight in the contemplation of his excellence, lead them forward from one department of his perfections to another, and make the whole creation itself speak forth his praises. Thus may he accumulate the materials of ceaseless rapture to eternity; elevating his worshippers perpetually in adoration, at the same time that he lays them lower in prostration before him. Hence we are taught in the

Scriptures to believe that these communications and disclosures of himself by the Deity will constitute the felicity of heaven—this intimate union between the hearts of his creatures and his own essential character, there described as the vision of God, or the intuitive knowledge of him as a spirit, will form the principal ingredient of future happiness. Our Saviour represents himself as the source of this happiness; "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."* The apostle Paul, also, speaking of the perfection of the happiness of heaven, describes it as resulting from the immediate sight of the Divine glory. "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then shall we see face to face; now I know in part, then shall I know even as also I am known."

Even while they continue on earth, it is the privilege of the faithful to enjoy that union and alliance with the Father of spirits, through his Son, by virtue of which they become one spirit with him. There are favoured seasons, when filled, even to overflowing, with a sense of his love, the wilderness appears to them more beautiful than the peopled city. At such seasons, though all the evils that afflict the flesh may attempt to assail the immortal mind, he can be so present to the heart, and impart to the soul such ecstasies of enjoyment, as will more than overpower the violence of pain, and even prevail over the agonies of death.

We now proceed to a brief practical improvement of the subject before us:—

Let us, in contemplating the Divine Being, endeavour to raise ourselves above the association of our minds with what is sensible, visible, and corporeal, and retire within our own nature; not for the purpose of seeking happiness there, but that we may feel our necessity of God, and perceive the demand which the highest powers of our nature make for such a Being, and the impossibility of their finding rest but in his knowledge, obedi-

* John xvii. 24.

ence, and love. The natural effect of communion with ourselves is to convince us of our own emptiness and nothingness, at the same time that it indicates our native grandeur, inasmuch as there is nothing that can constitute our rational portion but God. In your calmest moments, my brethren, you will find that you possess an understanding capable of contemplating God, and that He only can be an adequate object to engage and employ that understanding, because he is the only being capable of affording to you light, happiness, and life, through a boundless eternity. You possess a conscience, which gives a moral character to all your actions, tinctures with an evil of its own peculiar kind (the evil of guilt) whatever it condemns, and invests with an attribute of moral beauty and rectitude whatever it approves:—whence you will perceive that you never can be happy till conscience is on your side, till the character of your actions and thoughts is such as will bear the review of that inward monitor. To produce this effect is to harmonize a man with his own conscience—to bring him to be at peace with himself, because at peace with God---to place him on a moral centre, where he can rest self-poised amidst all the fluctuations of the external world. You will find within you a susceptibility which recoils from pain and thirsts for pleasures; not merely those that are corporeal in their nature, but also mental and intellectual, such as those which we taste in friendship, and in the contemplation of virtue and truth. Hence you will perceive that you can never be truly and eternally happy till these affections have an adequate object; and that never will be found except in the supreme, eternal, original Spirit. He alone can so communicate himself to you, and give you such a knowledge of his character, and such a sense of his friendship, as will render you in a great measure independent of all earthly objects. You will perceive that he is fitted to be himself the sole and exclusive object of all these powers; you will see the propriety and beauty of that exclamation—" Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire in comparison of thee."

Since God is a spirit, and we are principally distinguished by possessing a rational and immortal nature, there must be an everlasting connexion established between him and us,—either favourable or injurious, of reward or punishment, of mercy or justice,—on which will depend our destiny for ever. There must be a meeting of all finite spirits in the presence of the infinite, original Spirit, when an account must be given to God of "the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or evil." Your happiness must eternally consist in the favour of that Being to whom you are perpetually responsible for all the sentiments of your heart, and all the actions of your life. If you die in a state of disobedience, impenitence, and alienation from God, you will incur the doom denounced against those whom our Saviour threatened that if they believed not in him, but rejected his mission and authority, they should die in their sins. A more awful denunciation, who can conceive?—"If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins; and whither I go, ye cannot come."

The consequence will be, that the Being whom you have neglected and forgotten will be the constant and eternal source of your misery. You will sink under his frown; separation from him will be the great cause of your anguish; you will be vessels of his wrath; you will have fitted yourselves, by contempt of the supreme authority, and alienation from the supreme good, to be for ever in a state of wretchedness, because of separation from Him who is "the fountain of living water."

Since God is a spirit, and we are unable to raise ourselves so high as to attain the favour and friendship of such a Being, whose entirely spiritual nature is so subtile that it eludes our unassisted conceptions;—in order that the worship of the true God may be adapted to become the universal religion, Jesus Christ has come down to earth, has assumed human nature, embodied the attributes of God in an incarnate form, and thus taught us the character of the Deity in his own actions. We know the principles of the divine conduct in the government of the world, by the conduct and character of our

blessed Saviour in his life. He is "the image of the invisible God," the only representation of Deity: "He that hath seen me," said he, "hath seen the Father." The design of his coming into this world was to bring back apostate creatures to his Father; "to make reconciliation for iniquity," by the sacrifice of himself upon the cross; and thus to remove all those impediments which spring from the character of God to acceptance in his sight, and to restore them to the enjoyment of his eternal favour. He gave himself a sacrifice on the altar of justice, that a free passage might be opened to the favour of his heavenly Father, without any impeachment of the Divine character; "that he might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

What movements are in your minds, my brethren, with respect to this great object, at this time? Are your thoughts stationary, or are they moving in a right or a wrong direction? Are you under the guidance of Christ, seeking increased acquaintance with him, aspiring after higher degrees of resemblance to him, fixing your hopes more firmly upon his promises? Then all things will be favourable to you; "the world, or life, or death, things present, or things to come,—all are yours." You have obeyed from the heart the call of the gospel; you have forsaken the world; have become dead to it before you are called to leave it; and have laid up treasure in heaven, having trusted your souls to the hands of the Divine Redeemer; "you know whom you have believed, and are persuaded that he is able to keep that which you have committed unto him until that day." But if your minds are engaged in a contrary direction; if you are seeking happiness in the things of this world, living in the neglect of God, never raising your thoughts to the contemplation of the Supreme Good,—if, having rejected the great salvation, you are content to lie under the weight of unacknowledged, and therefore unpardoned, guilt,—yet bear with me while I remind you that you must have a meeting with God; you must see the face of that Divine Being whose authority you have spurned, and feel the anger of that Divine Redeemer whom you

have rejected. You will, if you persist in this course, hear him pronounce the fearful sentence, "Those mine enemies, that would not have me to reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me:" "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Blessed be God, there are those now present who are placing their affections habitually on the great Supreme, and uniting themselves, more and more closely, to him by faith in the Son of God. Let such persons rejoice in the prospects before them. The interruptions which arise from your corporeal state will speedily terminate; the flesh shall then no longer lust against the spirit, nor the spirit against the flesh; but you will "do the things that you would." You have preferred the interests of the mind to those of the body; the service of Jesus Christ, and the prospects of eternity, to all sublunary good. You are approaching nearer and nearer to the Chief Good; you are hungering and thirsting after righteousness; and you shall certainly be satisfied. God approves your choice, and will assist your infirmities; "he will strengthen you with all might by his Spirit in your inner man;" will "work in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure;" and enable you to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

"They that sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; they that sow to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Let us make continual progress in christian virtue. Every act of sin has a tendency to misery. Every effort to subdue corruption, and to live to the will of God, is, on the contrary, a seed which, by God's grace, will bring forth fruit to everlasting life. By patient continuance in well-doing, let us seek for glory, honour, and immortality; for to such God will assuredly recompense eternal life: but to those that are disobedient, and do not obey the truth, "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish." "On the wicked he will rain fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup."*

* Rom. ii. 7—9; Ps. xi. 6.

II.

THE GLORY OF GOD IN CONCEALING.

PROVERBS XXV. 2.—*It is the glory of God to conceal a thing.**

[PREACHED AT CAMBRIDGE, SEPTEMBER, 1826.]

IT is difficult to say whether the glory of God appears more in what he displays, or in what he conceals, of his operations and designs. Were he to conceal every thing from our view, it would be impossible that any glory could result to him from the sentiments and actions of his creatures. From entire ignorance nothing could arise, no medium of intercourse could be established between the creature and the Creator. In the total absence of the knowledge of God, religion must be totally excluded and unknown. But it is by a partial communication of himself, which the Divine Being might, if he pleased, in various degrees extend and increase beyond the present measure, that he has in the highest degree consulted his honour and manifested his wisdom. If there were no light, we should sink into a state of irreligious doubt and despair; if there were no darkness, we should be in danger of losing that reverential sense of his infinite majesty so essential to religion, and of impiously supposing that the Almighty is such an one as ourselves. But a temperature of mingled light and obscurity, a combination of discovery and concealment, is calculated to produce the most suitable impressions of the divine excellence on the minds of fallen creatures. When God was pleased to favour his ancient people with a supernatural display of his presence, by a visible symbol, during their journey through the wilderness, it wore this twofold aspect; it was a pillar of cloud and of fire, dark in the day-time and luminous in the night; and when he conducted them through the Red Sea, he turned the bright side of the cloud towards the camp of

* From the Notes of Joshua Wilson, Esq.

Israel, and the gloomy side towards the Egyptians by whom they were pursued.*

When he descended on Mount Sinai, the token of his presence was a mass of thick and dark clouds, penetrated at intervals by flashes of lightning. On the third day, in the morning, we are informed, there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount; and, it is added, "the mount was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace." When Solomon had finished his temple, the manifestation which the Deity made of himself, in taking possession of it and consecrating it to his service, was of the same character. No sooner had the priests gone out of the holy place, than the cloud filled the house of the Lord; and "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord." The first indication of the divine presence was the overspreading of thick darkness, which afterwards subsided, and unfolded itself gradually, till it terminated in an insufferable splendour. Upon observing this, Solomon, at the commencement of his celebrated prayer, used these words: "The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness."† If God dwells in light inaccessible, he equally makes darkness his dwelling-place,—"his pavilion dark waters and thick clouds of the sky." "Clouds and darkness," says David, "are round about him; righteousness and judgement are the habitation of his throne." In this view of the character and dispensations of the Almighty, the Psalmist probably alludes to those sensible indications of his presence which are recorded in his ancient oracles.

At our Saviour's transfiguration, the three disciples retained their composure until *the cloud* appeared; for they knew that to be the symbol of the immediate presence of the Deity. "*They feared*," we are told, "*when they entered into the cloud;*" and it was thence the voice proceeded, saying, "*This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.*"

* Exod. xiv. 19, 20. † 1 Kings viii. 12.

These representations are in perfect harmony with the doctrine of the passage under our present consideration, in which the wisest of men, speaking by inspiration, informs us that "it is the glory of God to conceal a thing." He does it with a design to promote his glory, being by necessity his own ultimate and final end.

There are two observations naturally suggested by these words :—

I. The Divine Being is accustomed to conceal much.

II. In this he acts in a manner worthy of himself, and suited to display his glory.

I. We shall specify some of the instances in which God conceals things.

1. In relation to his own nature and the manner of his existence.

His essence is altogether hidden from the most profound investigation, the most laborious research, the most subtile penetration, of his creatures. With respect to this, it may be said, "Who by searching can find out God; who can find out the Almighty to perfection?" We know that he possesses certain attributes, which we distinguish by different names drawn from analagous excellencies among men, exclusive of all limit or imperfection found in human nature. We ascribe to him every idea of virtue and spiritual beauty, exalted to infinite perfection. But how the Divine Being himself exists in an essential and eternal nature of his own, without beginning as well as without end,—how he can be present at the same moment in every point of illimitable space, without excluding any one of his creatures from the room it occupies,—how, unseen, unfelt by all, he can maintain a pervading and intimate acquaintance and contact with all parts and all portions of the universe,—how he can be at once all eye, all ear, all presence, all energy, yet interfere with none of the perceptions and actions of his creatures,—this is what equally baffles the mightiest and the meanest intellect; this is the great mystery of the universe, which is at once the most certain and the most incomprehensible of all things; —a truth at once enveloped in a flood of light and an

abyss of darkness. Inexplicable itself, it explains all besides: it casts a clearness on every question, accounts for every phenomenon, solves every problem, illuminates every depth, and renders the whole mystery of existence as perfectly simple as it is otherwise perfectly unintelligible, while itself *alone* remains in impenetrable obscurity! After displacing every other difficulty, it remains the greatest of all, in solitary, insurmountable, unapproachable grandeur! So truly "clouds and darkness are round about him." "He maketh darkness his secret habitation; his pavilion to cover him, thick clouds."

His perfections are impressed on the works of nature; but in such a manner that we learn them only by inference. We ascend from effects to causes; from the marks of contrivance and design, to the necessary existence of an Almighty Contriver. But what sort of being he is, and what is the nature of his contact with his creatures, must, in the present state at least, remain an unfathomable mystery. We are utterly at a loss in all such speculations; yet this affords no diminution of the motives of piety. Our belief in the being of a God is the belief of a profound mystery. The very idea of such a Being would appear incredible were it not that it is necessary, because the greatest absurdities would flow from supposing the contrary. Nothing can be accounted for unless we admit the existence of a causeless Cause—a presiding Governor of the universe. We are compelled therefore to choose the less difficulty of the two; or rather, to choose difficulty instead of impossibility, mystery instead of absurdity: and hence we repose on this grand truth.

2. The Divine Being observes the same method of concealment, in a great variety of respects, with regard to the structure and constitution of his *works*. The scenes of nature lie open to our view; they solicit our senses, and are adapted to impress themselves in a most lively manner upon our minds. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handywork." We cannot look around us without beholding,

not only the works themselves, but evident traces of that matchless wisdom, power, and goodness, whence they sprang. Still, the mysteries of nature, with regard to the *essences* of things, and indeed to a multitude of subtile *operations*, are kept in a kind of sacred reserve, and elude the utmost efforts of philosophy to surprise them in their concealments and bring them to light. While Science goes on from step to step in the march of her discoveries, it seems as if her grandest result was the conviction how much remains undiscovered; and, while nations in a ruder state of science have been ready to repose on their ignorance and error, or to confound familiarity with knowledge, the most enlightened of men have always been the first to perceive and acknowledge the remaining obscurity which hung around them; just as, in the night, the farther a light extends, the wider the surrounding sphere of darkness appears. Hence it has always been observed, that the most profound inquirers into nature have been the most modest and humble. So convinced was Socrates, the chief luminary of the ancient world, of the great obscurity attending all such inquiries, that he abandoned the search of nature, and confined his disquisitions to moral questions, and rules for the conduct of life. The same illustrious man declared, that he knew no reason why the oracle of Delphi pronounced him to be the wisest of men, except it was that, being conscious of his ignorance, he was willing to confess that he knew nothing. Newton, the greatest philosopher whom the modern world has known, declared, speaking of a distinguished contemporary from whose genius he augured vast discoveries, but who died in early life, (the celebrated Cotes,) "If that young man had lived, we should have known something." In so modest a manner did he advert to his own imperfect knowledge of that science with which he had attained such prodigious acquaintance as to have become the pride and wonder of the world! Those that have devoted themselves to an investigation of the laws of nature, find, in a great variety of the most common productions, sufficient to engage their inquiries and employ

their faculties: they perceive that the meanest work of God is inexhaustible;—contains secrets which the wisdom of man will never be able to penetrate. They are only some of the superficial appearances and sensible properties with which we are familiar. Substances and essences we cannot reach. The secret laws which regulate the operations of nature we cannot unveil. Indeed, we have reason to believe that the most enlarged understanding must, in a very short time, resolve its inquiries into the will of God as the ultimate reason. Thus, one of the best effects of intellectual cultivation, and the acquisition of knowledge, is to restore the mind to that state of natural simplicity and surprise in which every thing above, beneath, and around us, appears replete with mystery, and excites those emotions of freshness and astonishment with which the scenes of nature are contemplated during the season of childhood.

3. God is accustomed to conceal much in the dispensations of his providence. The dispensations of the divine providence are that series of actions which the Divine Being is continually carrying on in the government of the world which he has made. This, though it presents many evident marks of wisdom and design, is also eminently endowed with the property of obscurity. "*God is known by the judgements which he executeth.*" The established order of providence in this world makes manifest to every serious and reflecting mind, that, "*there is verily a God that judgeth in the earth.*" There exists such a decided connexion between well-doing and happiness on the one hand, and between wickedness and misery on the other, as sufficiently to show, even independently of revelation, that the Divine Being is the patron of rectitude and the enemy of vice. Yet, while there is a prevailing tendency in virtue to promote happiness, this tendency is not always carried into actual effect. The natural course of things is frequently interrupted and suspended by incidental causes: so that particular exceptions are continually occurring to the ordinary rule.

There are two respects in which the Divine Being perpetually conceals the ways of his providence.

(1.) He conceals the design for which many events are permitted to take place.

There are many important circumstances and events, the reason of which will probably remain, to the end of time, altogether inscrutable: such, for instance, as the depression of the righteous; the success of fraud and violence; the frustration of the purposes of benevolence and virtue; the prevalence of persecution; the sufferings of martyrs; the limited diffusion of christianity; the extent to which idolatry has been suffered to desolate the moral world, and "the mystery of iniquity" to overspread a large portion of Christendom. The best and wisest of men have confessed themselves at a loss to interpret the design of the divine dispensations with respect to themselves and their contemporaries. Even prophets have acknowledged that their minds were for a time perplexed by the anomalies of providence: "Righteous art thou, O Lord," says Jeremiah, "yet let me talk with thee of thy judgements: Wherefore do the wicked prosper?" And David, when he reflected on the prosperity of the wicked, the unequal distribution of good and evil, and the afflictions to which the righteous were exposed, was tempted to exclaim, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain;" nor did he find any satisfaction until he went into the sanctuary of God, and there understood their end.

(2.) The Divine Being is accustomed to throw much obscurity over the future. He makes the present the scene of our duty, while he has, in a great degree, hidden futurity from our view. "We know not what shall be on the morrow;" we are ignorant of the next event that shall arise, and cannot, with all the light we can gather round us, determine what shall befall us at the next moment: we are impelled forward on the stream of time, but know not what is immediately before us. This ignorance of the future is complete with respect to the period of our own lives. Our existence this moment is

no security for its continuance the next: "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." It is always a matter of awful uncertainty, when we enter on the business of the day, whether we shall close it in time or eternity; when we compose our eyes to slumber, in which world we shall open them. The future is ever in the hand of God. No man can say with confidence that any one scheme he is pursuing shall be attended with success,—any one hope or fear which he entertains be realized. Every period of our life is opening some fresh page, the contents of which no human sagacity can determine; nor is there a single event that may take place under the sun, which can be known with certainty until it be actually accomplished. God reserves the causes of events in his own hand; and all that the highest wisdom can attain is such a degree of probability as may lay a foundation for distant and uncertain conjecture. He leads nations, as well as individuals, "by the way that they know not." The scenes are shifted and changed by an invisible hand, in such a manner as clearly to prove, that the collective wisdom of mankind is no more competent to direct their way, than the solitary wisdom of individuals.

We have had a very stiking instance of this, in the change that has recently taken place in the state of this nation;* which has, not by a slow gradation, but in the course of a very few weeks, and almost as it were instantaneously fallen from the highest elevation to the lowest depression. From a state of unexampled prosperity, when we were exulting in the expectation of

* This sermon was delivered in a season of great public calamity. A supposed failure in the crops produced the alarm of famine. The year 1826 was, throughout, extremely unfavourable to trade and manufactures. The number of bankrupts in the first six months had been nearly quadruple the number in the first six months of 1825. Labourers were so inadequately employed, as to render them in great measure dependent on the contributions of the more affluent for the immediate necessaries of life. An universal "panic" prevailed among commercial men; the *average* depreciation in the value of marketable commodities exceeded 18 per cent.; and all classes were struggling with extraordinary difficulties.—Ed.

still brighter scenes, our prospect has become suddenly clouded with embarrassment, distress, and dismay. Who could anticipate that famine would thus rise out of the midst of plenty; want of subsistence, in the midst of the greatest abundance both of the natural productions of the earth and the artificial productions of human industry? Was there any one of the wise men of the world,—any one of those whose office it is to superintend the affairs of nations, and conduct them as far as finite minds can conduct them,—who formed the slightest conjecture of such a state of things? Did any of them foretell it? Had any one presented to his mind the faintest glimpse of that event which God in his providence has brought upon us? No:—the destinies of nations are entirely in *his* hand, and "he doeth according to his will among the inhabitants of the earth, as well as in the army of heaven." He is pleased, indeed, usually, to give us some glimpses into futurity, by establishing a certain order in the dealings of his providence with rational creatures. While this enables us to employ means which are adapted to produce certain effects, yet he so frequently frustrates the natural tendency of actions, as to convince us that the course of events is under the control of a superior power. "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding." Hence, while encouragement is given to the practice of virtue, by its general tendency to promote our temporal interest and advantage, confidence in our own wisdom and prudence, in neglect of a devout acknowledgement of the hand of God, appears to be the highest presumption. "The foolishness of God" appears, on many occasions, "wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men." Individuals are sometimes defeated and ruined, even by the success of their own precautions; while, on the other hand, temerity and folly are sometimes permitted to accomplish what wisdom could not effect. Exceptions to the success of human effort are so numerous, and the variety of events on which that success depends so complicated, as continually to remind us of our absolute de-

pendence on that unseen Being who conducts us whithersoever he will, and accomplishes the whole purpose of his mind, without *giving an account of any of his matters.*

The most important events of human life, on which our happiness greatly depends, are, for the most part, concealed from our view. Very few persons have ascertained, with any degree of accuracy, either the degree or the kind of prosperity and success with which their efforts in pursuit of human felicity have been crowned. The greatest evils which we are called to endure generally take us by surprise, and the most favourable results have been so produced as to render it apparent that they were not entirely the fruit of our own sagacity, providence, or enterprise. There is no event so interesting to us as our departure from this world,—that great change, so comprehensive that it includes every other; yet this the Divine Being usually conceals. *Man also,* says the author of this book, *knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.** Very few persons die at the precise period which their own imaginations have allotted to that event. Death overtakes most "as a thief in the night." No man is enabled to ascertain at "what hour the Son of man cometh;" and while we are kept in perpetual uncertainty respecting this event, it is the greatest vanity to boast of our foreknowledge of any other, because, when this arrives, our interest in the present world ceases. All that is done under the sun, all the joys and sorrows, successes and disappointments, which take place among men, are then, in regard to us, events that occur in another world. It is true, indeed, that where the bulk of mankind, or great multitudes are concerned, the calculation of chances respecting their average continuance on earth may be easy and exact: errors on one side are corrected and balanced by those on the opposite; the vibrations of the

* Eccles. ix. 12.

pendulum being equivalent to its remaining stationary. But, with individuals, the case is altogether different; all inferences in reference to the termination of individual life are vain. No person, therefore, can justify himself in deferring till to-morrow his preparation for that eternal world which may be the first thing that presents itself to his awaking faculties.

4. The Divine Being is pleased to conceal much in the economy of grace and redemption. In the manifestations of his will, even in that dispensation which is intended to afford some knowledge of himself, and of his gracious purposes and designs to the children of men, he maintains the same character, and mingles, in almost equal proportions, obscurity and brightness. Revelation, indeed, by its very nature, is intended to impart information. We are taught in Scripture, in the New Testament especially, many of the "deep things of God;" and we are under unspeakable obligations for that "*dayspring from on high which has visited us*, to guide our feet into the way of peace, and give knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins." Yet the revelation contained in the Scriptures extends only to *facts*, not to the theory of those facts, or their original causes. The most important truths are communicated in a dogmatic, not a theoretic, manner. We are taught, on the testimony of Him that cannot lie, insulated facts which we cannot connect with those reasons with which they are undoubtedly connected in the divine mind. They rest solely on the basis of divine authority; and we are left as much in the dark with respect to the mode of their existence as if they were not revealed. He has given us reason to believe that the Godhead subsists in three persons; distinct acts of personal agency being ascribed to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, while worship and adoration are claimed for them separately: but the theory of this is utterly beyond our comprehension; nor does it appear to be any part of the intention of scripture to put us in possession of that theory. Those who have ventured to approach too near this inaccessible light, though with honest and sincere intentions, have, for the most part, by

attempting to explain it, involved the subject in deeper obscurity, and "darkened counsel by words without knowledge."

We are expressly informed that "the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God, was made flesh, and dwelt among men." There was a mysterious and inconceivable union betwixt the divine nature of the Son of God, who was "the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person," before the world began, and the man Christ Jesus. But when we attempt to develope this mystery, and inquire how this union was effected and maintained without the two natures being identified, or their respective properties being confounded, we are utterly at a loss. We affirm nothing more than the matter of fact, we only put into other words the express testimony of the inspired writers, without pretending to unfold the mystery of his person, who was Immanuel, God with us. Surely, if we cannot discover how the Divine Being *made* man, it must be far beyond our faculties to comprehend how the Creator of the world *became* a partaker of the nature he had made. This, which has been styled the hypostatical union,—in consequence of which, the blood shed upon the cross, being the blood of God's own Son, possesses that marvellous efficacy, by virtue of which it cleanses from all sin,—will probably for ever remain an impenetrable secret. *Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.* We are far from suppressing our conviction that this is a great mystery; we rejoice, on the contrary, in its incomprehensibility; we delight to lose ourselves in the impenetrable shades which invest the subject, because in the darkness and cloud which envelope it God dwells. It is the greatness which forms the mystery of the fact,—the matchless love and condescension constitute the very nucleus of the difficulty. It could only be brought within the sphere of our comprehension by a contraction of its vast dimensions, by a depression of its native grandeur. A prostration of it to the level of our feeble capacities would only render it incapable of being the magnet of souls, the attraction of

hearts, the wonder of the universe. The effect of this great fact on every one who has sufficient humility to believe the word of God, is not at all diminished by its mysterious grandeur. On the contrary, the fact itself is replete with moral influence and practical effect. Could the whole theory of the incarnation be laid open to our view, no additional force would be given to those motives to fervent gratitude and devotedness to the service of our Redeemer, which the mere fact is adapted to inspire. The practical influence is not at all impaired, but rather heightened, by the speculative difficulties which attend it, because these result merely from its ineffable grandeur. The same may be said with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity. The distinct parts assigned to the three divine persons exhibit the beautiful harmony of the plan of redemption; the Father sending his Son, the Son executing his Father's will, the Holy Spirit sanctifying the people of God by dwelling in their hearts. These truths are not less practical, on account of the mystery which invests the subject. We are as able to adore the grace of the Father, the love of the Son, the communion of the Holy Spirit,—to value the distinct agency of the several persons, in the work of our salvation, as if we could clearly perceive the theory of this unspeakable mystery.

With regard to the doctrine of the atonement, we are taught all that is necessary for us to know; that the blood of Jesus Christ is the price of our redemption, and that it was infinitely worthy of God, "in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." We can perceive, in some degree, its tendency to advance and maintain the honour of God, as Moral Governor of the world. But many questions may be proposed, with respect to the extent of its efficacy, which our reason cannot penetrate. What connexion this great sacrifice may have with the happiness, what influence on the destiny, of beings of a higher order, we have no distinct and satisfactory knowledge, though the Scriptures give some faint intimation

of the fact; but this affords no objection to the testimony they contain, that "for us *men*, and for *our* salvation," the Son of God became incarnate, suffered, and died. It is worthy of the reserve of Infinite Majesty, to give us very brief hints with respect to the influence of these great facts on the innocent and holy part of the creation, to the utmost extent of his dominions.

Again: the operation of the Spirit of God in regeneration and sanctification we acknowledge to be highly mysterious: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." All christians, indeed, know by experience the influence of the Spirit; but what is that mysterious principle, styled grace—how it connects itself with the human mind— where its operations cease, and the operations of the human faculties begin—are questions which probably the wisest of men can no more unfold, than the weakest and most ignorant: they are very far beyond the comprehension of the human understanding. But is it, on this account, less our duty to implore that sacred influence? If it be necessary, as the antidote of our depravity, "if that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit only is Spirit," and, consequently, "except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit."—of the Spirit operating as water, by cleansing and sanctifying the soul—"he cannot see the kingdom of God;" is his obligation to seek it less, because he cannot explore this mystery? Is the folly of neglecting it more venial, because he cannot penetrate the speculative depths of this doctrine? If any one feels by happy experience that power, by which those who were "dead in trespasses and sins are quickened, raised up, and made to sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus;" if he feels that "all old things are passed away, and all things become new" within him; that he is braced by a new energy, animated by a new life, expatiates in the world to come as if it were his own; is less gratitude due for these mighty operations, because he

cannot detect and analyse the power by which they have been wrought, or explain the philosophy of divine influence?

These observations may be applied to all the other mysterious facts of christianity, either past or future. The resurrection of the dead must be admitted to be a great mystery, which nothing but the occurrence of the fact can unfold. The apostle puts this question into the mouth of an infidel: "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" which he answers in a very unceremonious manner: "Thou fool! that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." The glorious prospect opened by this doctrine is not less animating because it surpasses our comprehension: on the contrary, its profundity only serves to increase our astonishment, and enhance our gratitude. The apostle, in his apology before Felix, resolves the whole into an immediate exertion of divine power: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible, that God *should raise the dead?*" If, indeed, the gospel professed to teach the theory of the fact, it would be a just objection, that this was beyond the grasp of our faculties. If, on the contrary, it merely reveal *facts*, and those facts have immediate practical bearings on the hearts and lives of those who receive them, all objections on account of their mysteriousness are futile, because they proceed on the supposition that God intended to develope the whole mystery, whereas he discovers only so much as may be adapted to rectify the conscience and purify the heart.

II. I shall now attempt to show how the Divine Being promotes his glory, by such a temperature of light and shade as that which distinguishes all his discoveries of himself, and his dispensations towards his creatures.

1. The concealment which he has thrown in these various respects over his ways, works, and word, tends to glorify him, as it is, in part, the necessary consequence of

his infinite superiority to all finite beings in wisdom and understanding,—the inevitable result of his being God. His wisdom is that which belongs to him as the Fountain of wisdom, the Father of lights, the Source of all knowledge. His purposes and designs cannot, therefore, be adequately scanned by the wisdom of men, from whom he must necessarily conceal more than he reveals. A child is not at once able to comprehend the reasons of his father, in imposing those restraints and privations which are a necessary part of parental discipline. It is only by degrees that his feeble capacity can be made to penetrate the secret of his education. If this be the case with respect to two finite minds, one of which has only arrived at greater maturity than the other, how much more disproportionate must be the plans of Infinite Wisdom to our narrow faculties? and what force does such a consideration give to that appeal of the apostle, "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" Surely we owe as much deference to the wisdom, as much reliance on the kindness of the Eternal Parent, as we give to our earthly father! The infinite superiority of the divine perfections renders this concealment necessary. He cannot, on account of his incomparable greatness and excellence, bring his plans and operations within the comprehension of his creatures. Viewing eternity in all its extent, having present to his mind all that is past and all that is future, seeing the end from the beginning, looking forward to the remotest period, and embracing in his prospect all possible events, he regulates his conduct upon a scale which belongs only to him that inhabiteth eternity. Concealment is the necessary indication and proof as well as the effect of his being "infinite in counsel." The judgements of such a Being must, by the necessity of his nature, be, to our limited apprehensions, "a great deep." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!"

2. The glory of God appears in concealing, because it evinces his entire independence on the wisdom, counsel, or co-operation, of any or all of his creatures. It is his prerogative to be the only Being to whom it is always safe to conceal his designs and purposes. It is seldom safe for persons, in the highest stations, to conduct a complicated scheme of operations, without taking advantage of counsel: "In the multitude of counsellors," says the wise man, "there is safety." No greater folly can be practised by so weak and frail a being as man, than, in matters of great moment, to decline taking the assistance of other minds. It is the privilege of very few, if any, mortals, to possess at once that penetration and that comprehension of view, which would render it expedient for them to tread the most perilous paths alone. He that despises the counsel of others, is, for the most part, sure to rue the effects of his folly. Nor is it necessary that the party consulted, should possess superior capacity or even knowledge of the subject in question. Different individuals see the same object in different lights, and a person of weaker intellect, not being immediately concerned, may be much more cool and impartial; some circumstances, therefore, which escaped the attention or the recollection of the most sagacious individual whose passions were excited, may occur to another person possessed of a very inferior degree of intellectual power. Those who are the immediate agents in any plan of operation, have their feelings generally too much excited, are too eagerly engaged in the chace, to be capable of discerning all those possibilities of disappointment and frustration which may present themselves to the calm survey of indifferent spectators. But it is infinitely worthy of the Divine Being, to give no account of any of his matters, with a view to obtain information from his creatures. "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgement, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket.

and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity."* "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen."†

The Divine Being may, with infinite safety and propriety retire within himself into the secret recesses of his own essence, the depths of his own immensity, form his purposes apart, consult with none but himself. "He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it." The resources of his own nature are infinitely sufficient. Of whom should *he* ask light, who is himself the Father of lights? Why should *he* take advice of creatures, of whose wisdom all human knowledge is but a spark? There is not a portion of intelligence in the universe which is not already his own: to consult with his creatures would therefore be but to consult with himself. "There is, indeed, a spirit in man; but it is the inspiration of the Almighty which giveth him understanding." The counsels of God are his own counsels, unmixed with any communication of human wisdom. He cannot mingle his designs with any others, or take associate minds into his cabinet. He needs not to receive back, nor can he receive back from his creatures, any portion of the light which has been diffused from that ocean of wisdom and intelligence which eternally resides in himself.

3. The divine glory is promoted by concealing, inasmuch as such a degree of obscurity as attends the partial manifestation of the divine will, and the progressive developement of the divine purposes, is eminently adapted to the state, exigency, and condition of man. Many important purposes are accomplished by this temperature betwixt concealment and manifestation, as

* Isaiah xl. 13—15, 17. † Rom. xi. 34—36.

we have already in part shown, and proceed more fully to exhibit in a few particulars.

(1.) The prophetic part of the word of God, while it contains some general intimation of future events is expressed in language, or denoted by imagery, proverbially obscure. This is intended to afford some general knowledge of the future, or it would not be prophecy; but, at the same time, obscurity forms a necessary ingredient. Were it free from that,—were it like the language of narrative,—it would give such a distinct knowledge of the future event as would lead some persons to use means for the purpose of accomplishing it by their own power, and tempt others presumptuously to endeavour to frustrate it. The design of prophecy is not to enable persons to anticipate the minute circumstances of events, but partly to excite in the mind a general expectation, by presenting a vague and shadowy outline; partly to afford a striking illustration of the power and providence of God, in bringing to pass those events on the arrival of a distant age. The infinite wisdom of God appears in his foretelling future events in such a manner, that when they arrive, they accurately correspond to the prophecy in a variety of particulars; while in the mean time, the events are so darkly shadowed, that the human agents, by whom they are accomplished, are ignorant that, in so doing, they are, in fact, fulfilling the counsels of heaven. They merely follow the dictates of their own minds, act agreeably to their own inclinations, and have no intention of bringing to pass those events to which the prophecy has reference. Nebuchadnezzar little supposed that he was a mere rod in the hand of the Deity, to chastise his own people. Cyrus, when he set out for Babylon to deliver them, little supposed that the hand of God had girded him, and prepared his way before him. Both were unconscious agents in accomplishing the purposes of that Divine Providence whose wisdom enlightened their path, and whose energy sustained them. God had foretold, by his prophets, the rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jewish nation, and his crucifixion; yet the Jews, in delivering him up, as well

as Pilate and Herod in condemning and executing him, acted as freely, were therefore as much accountable, as if he had not been "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God delivered."* The treason that was practised by Judas on his Lord and Master had been announced by the psalmist David; yet how much is the wisdom of God magnified, in permitting this to remain so secret, that the very perpetrator was probably ignorant of it, acting with the same freedom and spontaneity, with as close an adherence to the dictates of his own heart, the peculiarities of his own character, as if no such prophecy had been recorded. Thus God secures the glory of his own foreknowledge, at the same time that he leaves undisturbed the sphere of human agency. Were future events so distinctly predicted as to be clearly foreseen, this would either destroy the proof of divine superintendence and agency, or would require such a perpetual miraculous control over the exercise of human faculties, as would be inconsistent with the state and condition of accountable creatures in a world of probation. It is also necessary that prophecy should not operate as precept; for, with some, the will of God clearly foreseen would have the force of a command, and would be fulfilled as such; which would confound human agency with divine. On the other hand, in consequence of this arrangement, none have it in their power to frustrate his designs: "He frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad;—turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish."† In order, therefore, that the free agency of creatures may be preserved, the time, and other circumstances of an event predicted, are permitted to remain so uncertain, that the persons who are to accomplish it continue ignorant of them till the event itself takes place.

Those great events which have materially affected the condition of the world, were foretold by the ancient prophets. But did the human agents know they were fulfilling these predictions? Nothing was farther from

* Acts ii. 23. † Isaiah xliv. 25

their view: "they meant not so, neither did their heart think so;"* they were merely gratifying their own little passions, pursuing no other end than their own sinister and selfish policy. They were instruments in the hands of the Divine Being, as passive in accomplishing his purposes, as the axe or hammer in the hands of a man. The predictions were therefore mingled with much obscurity, as I have before remarked, to leave the free agency of creatures undisturbed, and consequently their accountability unimpaired.

Prophecy is not intended to give men such a knowledge of futurity as to enable even the most sagacious to predict events. Those who have attempted with certainty to assign, beforehand, particular prophecies to particular events, have uniformly failed in their presumptuous endeavours. The design of prophecy is only to afford some general intimation, which may operate as either warning or encouragement. Its chief use is, after the event has taken place, to assure men of the universal providence of God, and convince them of that wisdom which foresees all future events, and that power which accomplishes them when the appointed period arrives. When, therefore the Divine Being has been disposed to lift, in some degree, the veil which conceals futurity, he has only done it so far as to excite a general and indefinite expectation of the event, by exhibiting its general character and features, but by no means to disclose such circumstances of time, place, and instrumentality, as might interfere, in the least degree, with the morality of human actions.

(2.) The Divine Being, by giving no account of the design of many dispensations of his providence, trains us to submission. He is the fit and proper object of trust to mankind. Trust in God is the grand principle of religion; it is another word, indeed, for faith, as that term is applied in the New Testament; the grand principle which distinguishes good men from men of the world. The former trust in God; and, trusting in him, their

* Isaiah x. 7.

souls are kept in peace. They commit their way to him, and resign their wills into his hands. God demands from his creatures universal confidence; not only explicit, but also implicit. The former is that which arises from a clear perception of his intentions and designs. When we are able to trace his counsels, our trust in him is regulated by our knowledge of his ways and purposes, and this must precede any exercise of the latter kind of trust. But when the Divine Being has, by such a manifestation of himself, by such a degree of illumination, established a conviction of his paternal character, and sufficiently revealed the principles of his government, it is worthy of his majesty to put his rational creatures to the test. Having had innumerable experimental proofs of his loving-kindness, and of those tender mercies which are over all his works, should we not be ready to follow him in a path that we cannot discern, even when his footsteps are in the great deep? May not the Father of the universe require all his rational offspring to place unlimited confidence in himself, to be willing to fall into his hands, to commit all their concerns to his disposal, to abandon themselves to his pleasure? When we consider, also, the provision he has made for our eternal happiness in the economy of redemption, in those exceeding great and precious promises which are there exhibited, and especially in the gift of his own Son, the sum and substance of all possible communications of good, how infinitely fit is it for such a creature, having to deal with such a God, to say, with the most entire self-oblivion, "Do with me as seemeth good in thy sight;" joy or sorrow, prosperity or adversity, are indifferent to me, since thou canst bring light out of darkness, order out of confusion, and cause those "light afflictions, which are but for a moment, to work for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

(3.) Another advantage derived from this proceeding, is, that it tends to promote humility and vigilance, at the same time that it excites to diligence and exertion. As we are to give account of our conduct, it is necessary that the Divine Being should afford us a rule of action,

and this must be clear and determinate. But it is not necessary that we should be informed of the issue of actions; these, therefore, he is pleased to keep in his own hand. Yet, as without the hope of attaining some advantage, to stimulate us to activity, the mind would become lethargic, because we should feel ourselves chained down by a fatal destiny, in helpless despondency; such a constitution is wisely established, that success may be the general rule, failure the exception. But occasional instances of the latter are useful, by teaching us not to lean to our own understanding. Men are now, notwithstanding their blindness to the future, too much disposed to "sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag;" but if they were capable of certainly foreseeing the issue of their schemes, —if the battle were always to the strong, and riches to men of understanding,—how would the strong man glory in his strength, the rich man in his riches! These objects of pursuit would be the source of most intemperate idolatry, and would utterly corrupt the mind of their possessor, by leading him to glory in himself, and not in God. On the other hand, were there no connexion between the cultivation of certain qualities and success, did no advantage result from the possession of them, there would be no motive to action, no inducement to make those exertions which promote the improvement of mankind, and of the institutions of society. Still, the knowledge that a successful result cannot be calculated upon with certainty, greatly tends to stamp vanity upon all that relates to the present world, and should lead men to trust in the living God, whose promises, resting on a certain basis, are secure of their final accomplishment.

Our ignorance of the events that may befall us, is also highly salutary. Were the period of that great and final event, death, perfectly certain, we should be tempted, during the interval, to sit down in the indulgence of security. Such knowledge would induce, in most men, the greatest rashness and presumption. While the event was at a distance, they would gratify their appetites

without restraint; they would, upon system, procrastinate attention to their eternal interests. Whereas, now, the uncertainty of its arrival furnishes the highest reason for being always ready, and renders the neglect of preparation the greatest folly and infatuation. It should operate as a solemn admonition from God to perpetual watchfulness and care, not to leave that undone, which, if undone at a dying hour, renders the doing of all other things merely vanity and vexation of spirit, while we are left in a state of inconsolable wretchedness. All pretence for delay being hereby cut off, the inattention of the majority of mankind to these divine warnings becomes utterly inexcusable; especially if we consider the magnitude of the event itself, and that the change it effects in our condition is not only awfully great, but will continue, beyond any possibility of future change, to eternity. Hence our Saviour urges this circumstance, as one of the most powerful motives to incessant vigilance: "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh. If the good man of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through." "Stand, therefore, having your loins girt, your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for the coming of their Lord. Who is that wise and faithful servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing?" God is pleased to deal with us, in the economy of his providence and grace, as creatures that possess reason, and are, therefore, accountable;—that can look forward, and make provision for the exigencies of the future,—and whose great business it is to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." The great necessity which attaches to us, is that of changing worlds; while our life is but a fleeting vapour, liable to be instantly extinguished. That event is perpetually suspended over us, as the inevitable circumstance attending our destiny; but we are in total ignorance of the time of its arrival. We cannot, therefore, without the greatest presumption, call a single moment our own. How is this arrangement adapted to fix and

concentrate our attention on the momentous event; to cause it to combine itself with all our plans and counsels! If we are wise, we shall constantly remember our latter end, be always ready, and not suffer that day to come upon us like a thief. "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments."

There is another less solemn, yet important view of this arrangement, which equally illustrates the wisdom of God in concealing future events. Were the time of our death foreseen, what a melancholy character would it impart to the pursuits and occupations of the human race! If every man saw the moment of his death continually before him, how would his thoughts be fixed to the fatal spot; and, upon its near approach, the consideration of it would probably absorb every other. With respect to our fellow-creatures, how would it poison the springs of enjoyment, were parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, able to calculate with certainty the period of each other's lives! We should seem to be walking among the victims of death; the scenes of human existence would lose all cheerfulness, animation, and beauty. The interests of society would also sustain most serious injury. Many great and noble enterprises would never have been begun could the persons, who in the hope of life engaged in them, have foreseen, that before they could be concluded, they themselves would be snatched away by the hand of death. Many discoveries, by which great benefit has been conferred on the world, would not have been elicited. Few efforts probably would be made to attain any object, the consequences of which terminate with the life of the party, if he foresaw that they would be intercepted by death. Who would venture to engage in any lucrative employment, if he certainly knew that the benefit would not be even partially realised during the term of his mortal existence? But, happily for mankind, events are concealed—duties only are made known. With respect also to calamities which stop short of death, how wisely is it ordered, that, in consequence of their coming upon us by surprise, the courage and fortitude

requisite to encounter them are not weakened by a presentiment of dread! The prospect of them perpetually before our eyes would throw a cloud over the whole path of life, and when they arrived would cause them to fall upon us with supernumerary and redoubled weight. On the other hand, could we foresee our successes, they would lose much of their flavour and relish. The surprise with which they often come upon us is one element in our enjoyment of them.

The future world also has been placed, by the wisdom of God, just in that light in which it is most for our benefit that it should be placed. Were we fixed in the situation of the apostle John, were the heavenly state continually laid open to our view, religion would be no longer a voluntary service; we should be forced to attend to objects so transcendently glorious brought thus near to us. Could we distinctly hear the voices, like mighty thunderings, heard within the vail, they would render us deaf to every earthly sound: religion would be no longer matter of choice; and, consequently, faith would be no longer matter of virtue. The preference of present to future interests, and therefore the exercise of self-denial, would be impossible. But the Divine Being has been pleased to throw over the heavenly world a great degree of obscurity. Jesus Christ has indeed brought life and immortality to light by the gospel; has raised our hopes to the highest point, by investing the future state of glory with unspeakable elevation and grandeur; but has not explicitly taught us in what that state will consist:—"It doth not yet appear what we shall be." We know enough of futurity to make it become the great object of our attention; although it does not so press upon our organs as to render us insensible to present scenes and interests.

4. The glory of God is concerned in concealing much in his character, works, providence, and revelation, because this will probably be a source of great additional happiness to the redeemed, and mingle itself among the elements of devotional enjoyment in the eternal state. A degree of surprise and astonishment, which cannot

consist wtth the perfect comprehension of whatever falls under our cognizance, appears to be one ingredient in the highest degree of felicity of which a rational being is susceptible. There is a principle in the constitution of our nature, which renders us dissatisfied with what we thoroughly understand in all its parts. When there is nothing more to be discovered, from that moment it begins to pall upon us, and we must pass to something which will give scope to the activities of the human mind.

The Deity is intended to be the everlasting field of the human intellect, as well as the everlasting object of the human heart, the everlasting portion of all holy and happy minds, who are destined to spend a blissful but ever-active eternity in the contemplation of his glory. This can only be effected by his concealing himself. He will for ever remain "The Unknown God." We shall ever be conscious that we know little compared with what remains to be known of him: that our most rapturous and lofty songs fall infinitely short of his excellence. If we stretch our powers to the uttermost, we shall never exhaust his praise, never render him adequate honour, never discharge the full amount of claim which he possesses upon our veneration, obedience, and gratitude. When we have loved him with the greatest fervour, our love will still be cold compared with his title to our devoted attachment. This will render him the continual source of fresh delight to all eternity. His perfection will be an abyss never to be fathomed; there will be depths in his excellence which we shall never be able to penetrate. We shall delight in losing ourselves in his infinity. An unbounded prospect will be extended before us; looking forward through the vista of interminable ages, we shall find a blissful occupation for our faculties, which can never end; while those faculties will retain their vigour unimpaired, flourish in the bloom of perpetual youth; . . . . and the full consciousness remain, that the Being whom we contemplate can never be found out to perfection . . . . . that he may always add to the impression of what we know, by throwing a veil of indefinite obscurity over his charac-

ter. The shades in which he will for ever conceal himself, will have the same tendency to excite our adoring wonder as the effulgence of his glory; the depths in which he will retire from our view, the recesses of his wisdom and power, as the open paths of his manifestation. Were we capable of comprehending the Deity, devotion would not be the sublimest employment in which we can engage. In the contemplation of such a Being, we are in no danger of going beyond our subject; we are conversing with an infinite object . . . . in the depths of whose essence and purposes we are for ever lost. This will probably give all the emotions of freshness and astonishment to the raptures of the beatific vision, and add a delightful zest to the devotions of eternity. This will enable the Divine Being to pour in continually fresh accessions of light; to unfold new views of his character, disclose new parts of his perfection, open new mansions in himself, in which the mind will have ample room to expatiate. Thus shall we learn, to eternity, that, so far from exhausting his infinite fulness, there still remain infinite recesses in his nature unexplored—scenes in his counsels, never brought before the view of his creatures; that we know but "parts of his ways;" and that, instead of exhausting our theme, we are not even approaching nearer to the comprehension of the Eternal All. It is the mysteriousness of God, the inscrutability of his essence, the shade in which he is invested, that will excite those peculiar emotions, which nothing but transcendent perfection and unspeakable grandeur can inspire.

Before I conclude this discourse, permit me to remind you, that while there are many things which God conceals, and thereby advances his glory, he has made manifest all that it is essential for man to know. Whatever is intimately connected with our duty is most plainly taught; whatever is important to our welfare and happiness is fully revealed. Do not for a moment imagine that he has concealed any thing that bears a near relation to your interest. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good." He has distinctly set before you the

good and evil of a future life. It is true, you know not the time of your death, but you know that you are mortal; you know not the particulars of what will succeed death, but you know that there will be a resurrection of the dead, "both of the just and also of the unjust;" that "they who have done good shall come forth to the resurrection of life, they that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation." Jesus Christ has disclosed in the gospel, as far as they are important for any practical purposes, the realities of eternity; has announced to you his second appearance to raise the dead, and decide the eternal destinies of the human race; to separate between the righteous and the wicked, place every individual of mankind in one of those classes, and divide them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. He has told you that he will say to the former, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;" and to the latter, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." He has assured you, that those who die in a state of impenitence, unbelief, and alienation from God, will sink into eternal misery; that their doom shall be to depart into everlasting punishment, prepared for the devil and his angels. Those, on the contrary, who are righteous, who are penitent believers, shall be raised in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and then caught up to meet the Lord in the air; afterwards be assessors with him in the judgement; and, at the end of that solemn process, shall enter with him through the gates into the city, and be for ever with the Lord. You are assured, that, immediately after the event of your death has taken place, there will remain no possibility of a change in your condition—that you will take possession of all the horrors of hell, or all the glories of heaven, the moment that the vapour of your life is extinguished in the element of death. He has told you, that you must have to do with Christ, either in the exercise of faith and trust here, or of astonishment and surprise, when you shall lift up your eyes and see, in the person of a neglected Saviour, your offended Sovereign

and righteous Judge! "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him; they also that pierced him shall wail because of him." "Before him shall be gathered all nations." They who have not received his gospel, submitted to his sceptre, cast themselves into the arms of his grace . . . . . shall be banished for ever from his presence. The divine glory is intrusted to him; the destinies of the world are committed to his hands. You have no other resource but to "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." He has not only disclosed to you the fact, but also many of the circumstances and appendages of that solemn assize, in which the eternal destinies of all mankind will be determined;—that a great white throne will be spread, and from the face of him that sitteth upon it the heavens and the earth will flee away;—that the books shall be opened, and all men judged out of the things written in those books, according to their works;*—that the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest; and an eternity of happiness or misery dealt out to every one by his mighty hand, according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or evil:—that the earth and all the works that are therein shall be burned up; that the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat;—that for the abode of the righteous there shall be new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;—that in the bottomless abyss prepared for apostate angels, all the wicked shall be for ever confined.

These are subjects on which the wisdom of man can say nothing, or can utter but the feeble articulations of infancy . . . . . The highest efforts of human sagacity reach not beyond the bounds of time; they cannot pass the threshold of eternity. They are scanty and inadequate,—and leave the world in darkness and misery, compared with these discoveries of revelation. Do not

* Rev. xx. 11—13.

conclude, from the partial obscurity which attends some of its truths, that religion is not the great concern of accountable immortal creatures, or that you will be justified in disregarding such affecting prospects as these. No, my brethren, this obscurity is not such as to hide from you your great interest, to make a right choice doubtful, or render it matter of the least hesitation whether you should serve God or not. God has revealed enough, where the light of the gospel comes, to give men the clearest information concerning their eternal welfare; has set before them life, and has set before them death; has pointed out the broad and the narrow way; shown them the path of destruction, that they may avoid it—and the way of life, that they may walk in it. Jesus Christ has come to render these things so plain and obvious, that even "wayfaring men, though fools, may not err therein." Though, with respect to the constitution of his person, mysterious as his Divine Father, being "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person;" with respect to the practical purpose of his incarnation, the great design of his appearance in human flesh, he is "the Light of the world: whoso followeth him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."† If you are earnest in seeking the salvation of your souls, you have all the evidence you can wish; you are distinctly informed, that a remedy has been provided, exactly suited to your case. Though you are guilty, the blood of Christ can expiate that guilt; though you are polluted, the Spirit of Christ can cleanse from that pollution. The gospel is every way adapted to your wants and misery. It has pleased the Father, that in Christ "all fulness should dwell." You are invited to come to him at this moment, to receive out of that fulness all spiritual blessings—pardon, sanctification and life everlasting. He has given you, in reference to these, "line upon line, precept upon precept." Jesus Christ has be-

* John viii. 12. † John xiv. 6.

come the incarnate wisdom of God. No person now need perish for want of a profound understanding, since the method of salvation has been brought down to the level of the meanest capacity: "Wisdom stands at the corners of the streets, and cries; To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men." Surely these are the deep things of God, which the Spirit who searcheth all things alone has explored; which the wisdom of the world never knew, the tongue of human eloquence never proclaimed, the discoveries of human philosophy never approached: but now they form the very elements of piety, so that the meanest person cannot neglect them without living in a practical defiance of God, and contempt of his authority. He has thrown an air of obscurity over a thousand other things, but not over "the things that make for your peace." You are not left in any uncertainty as to the basis of hope towards God. He has clearly taught you what you must do to be saved; how you may draw nigh to God, even to his seat; and through what medium you may pour out your hearts before him. "Behold (he says) I lay in Zion a foundation-stone. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins. Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." You know which is the path that will bring you to eternal blessedness; . . . . . that with shame and confusion of face, on account of your past transgressions, you "flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you;" that he may "of God be made unto you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." This is a plain path, open to all. "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God;" but these are "things revealed, that belong unto us, and to our children for ever."

Among the things fully revealed, is the placability of God, his readiness to receive the chief of sinners who repent of their sins and believe the gospel. He stands with open arms to receive returning prodigals. Though he condescends not to reveal the secrets of his wisdom,

counsel, and government, he has opened the secrets of his heart, displayed the riches of his compassion and grace. He says, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." This is your wisdom; this is your happiness; this is the only way to everlasting life. Let us all apply our hearts and consciences to the plain undeniable declarations of revelation. There will be no excuse for any one who lives a sinful, careless, and worldly life, and refuses to enter into covenant with God by the sacrifice of the Redeemer and to serve him, on account of the obscurity of the doctrine of salvation. That obscurity is not of such a nature as to darken its evidence, or render in the least degree doubtful, any thing that relates to the duties and prospects of accountable immortal creatures. There is no knowledge of any value to you in comparison with this—the knowledge of Christ, and him crucified. You are called upon, by believing in him, to unite yourselves to his promises, and cleave to his unsearchable riches. Have you done this? have you believed in this Saviour, who is the Light of the world? Are you walking in the light; or treasuring up materials of accummulated condemnation, by saying to God, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways," —though he approaches you, not in the character of a judge, but as the Father of mercies and the God of all grace, giving his "only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have everlasting life?" Let not this be "your condemnation, that light is come into the world, but that you loved darkness rather than light because your deeds are evil. But "walk in the light while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you." Submit to Jesus Christ; be guided by his holy truths and precepts; and you will attain that happiness which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man."

III.

ON THE DUTY, HAPPINESS, AND HONOUR, OF MAINTAINING THE COURSE PRESCRIBED TO US BY PROVIDENCE.

[PREACHED AT THE CHAPEL, MAZE POND, SOUTHWARK, MAY 26, 1811.]

Acts xiii. 25.—*As John fulfilled his course.**

The life of every individual may be compared to a river:—rising in obscurity, increasing by the accession of tributary streams, and, after flowing through a longer or shorter distance, losing itself in some common receptacle. The lives of individuals also, like the course of rivers, may be more or less extensive, but will all vanish and disappear in the gulf of eternity.—Whilst a stream is confined within its banks, it fertilizes, enriches, and improves, the country through which it passes; but if it deserts its channel, it becomes injurious and destructive, a sort of public nuisance, and, by stagnating in lakes and marshes, its exhalations diffuse pestilence and disease around. Some glide away in obscurity and insignificance; whilst others become celebrated, traverse continents, give names to countries, and assign the boundaries of empires. Some are tranquil and gentle in their course; whilst others, rushing in torrents, dashing over precipices, and tumbling in waterfalls, become objects of terror and dismay. But, however diversified their character, or their direction, all agree in having their course short, limited, and determined: soon they fall into one capacious receptacle; their waters eventually mix in the waves of the ocean. Thus human characters, however various, have one common destiny; their course of action may be greatly diversified, but they all lose themselves in the ocean of eternity.

Few have appeared on the stage of action whose life

* Printed from the Notes of W. B. Gurney, Esq.

was more important than that of the great prophet mentioned in my text. His course was a very extraordinary one, distinguished in some sense above all others, our blessed Lord himself only and always excepted. John was called to a very singular work; his ministry formed an epoch in the history of the church. It was the connecting link between the two dispensations. He first preached the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. "The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it."

The most extraordinary events began with the baptism of John, and continued until Christ was taken up into heaven. His peculiar office was to announce the Saviour of the world as then present in it; other prophets had spoken of him as *to come;* "*but there standeth,*" says John, "*among you one whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose.*" He was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord;" and whilst he was actually engaged in his commission, he was able to declare—"*Behold, he standeth among you.*" His commission was high;—to reclaim an apostate people; "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just;" "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." His career, too, was extraordinary, and his character and course marked and different from all others. Much of the wisdom of Providence appears in fitting the instrument to the work. The work appointed to John was to reclaim a nation from its departure from God, to rouse a people sunk in insensibility and impenitence, to preach repentance, to proclaim the approach of the kingdom of heaven, to usher in a higher economy, a new dispensation; and for all this he was admirably qualified. He was endued with the spirit and power of Elias. His spirit was undaunted and unyielding; he rebuked the pride of kings. He was indifferent and insensible alike to the charms of pleasure, the allurement of pomp, the smiles of power, and the frowns of greatness. His whole soul was concentrated in his object:—he was superior to the world; its forms

and fashions made no impression on his mind, and left no traces. He was austere in his manner, abstemious in his food, rustic in his apparel: he partook of the wildness of the wilderness in which he first made his appearance. "He had his raiment of camels' hair, a leathern girdle was about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey." These are lively images of his work. "Then went out unto him Jerusalem and all Judea, and the region round about Jordan; and were baptized of him, confessing their sins."

His ministry finished the legal, and brought in the evangelical dispensation. His voice was like the strong wind that bloweth—the whirlwind that maketh the earth to quake—the loud blast of that trumpet which was to wake the nations—the earthquake and the whirlwind which immediately preceded "the still small voice." His career was brilliant, and his success extraordinary. A large portion of the Jews became his converts, at least for a time: even the Scribes and Pharisees listened to him. "He was a burning and a shining light;" the apostles themselves were many of them first his disciples, and received from him those instructions which prepared them for the coming of the Messiah. By the authentic historian, Josephus, he is spoken of in terms of the highest encomium. It is remarkable, above all, that he was the only prophet born of woman, who was himself the subject of prophecy.

As his course was short, so was his end violent and tragical. He fell a martyr to his fidelity, and the artifices of an intriguing woman. Having rebuked Herod on account of his incestuous intercourse with his brother's wife, he was sacrificed to her resentment. He disappeared soon: his course was hurried and impetuous; eager, as it were, to reach its destination, and to mingle his grand soul with its kindred elements in eternity. He was raised up for a particular service; and when that was accomplished, he was removed. He was not *the* light, but the harbinger of that light, the morning star that was to usher in the Sun of Righteousness. "He bore witness of the light, but he was not that light;"

and no sooner did that light appear than he was withdrawn, that nothing might divide the great homage due to the Saviour, according to his own prediction—"He must increase, but I must decrease."

Having, perhaps, already detained you too long in contemplating the character and conduct of John the Baptist, I shall occupy what remains of our time, in illustrating and inculcating two or three practical observations, founded on the words of the text.

I. That there is a prescribed course or sphere of action appointed to every individual by the Author of our nature.

We are not a race of independent creatures abandoned to live without control: we are not sent into the world to follow the dictates of our own will. We cannot commit a greater mistake than to suppose that we are in any sense *our own*; we belong to another; even our limbs and faculties do not so much belong to ourselves, as we do to our Maker. To do his will, to conform to his pleasure, to keep his commandments, to fulfil his designs, to serve the end of his government, and to promote his glory; these are the great ends of our existence; and to attain them ought to be the fundamental law of our being: otherwise we live in vain, worse than in vain; and it would have been better for us never to have had an existence.

There is one great principle of a holy life, which is one and the same in all who live as they ought; and that is, conforming ourselves to the will of God, complying with his plan, doing every thing to please and glorify him. Thus our Saviour himself when in this world was devoted to his Father's will; this was his object constantly, even when observed by those around him. It cannot be better exemplified than in that beautiful saying of his, when he was requested to take refreshment at the well of Jacob—"I have meat to eat that the world knoweth not of; my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work;" and it is doing the will of God from the heart, which implies a careful attention to all the manifestations of it, and a

reverential regard to all the discoveries of it, with a fixed and determined resolution to comply with it whenever and wherever it is known. This, as I said, is the end of our existence, the business of our life; and we live to no purpose, or to a bad one, but as we conform to it. But, although this is the universal principle by which all are to be actuated and guided, yet it admits of great and numerous variations in its practical application. The principle is the same; but when it comes to be acted upon by individuals, and embodied in the experience and conduct of men in the several conditions of life, it gives birth to an endless diversity. To do the will of God, and to promote his glory, is the proper object and end of all: but the manner in which an apostle, for instance, was called upon to do this, is not that in which an ordinary teacher is to do it; nor the manner of an ordinary teacher that of a private christian. The duties of a sovereign are extremely different from those of his ministers and officers of state; and those again, from the duties of inferior magistrates; and of magistrates, from those of private subjects. Of the rich it is required "to do good and to communicate," to sustain the cause of God and truth in the world, to support public institutions of a charitable and beneficial nature, and freely to distribute of their abundance to the necessities of their fellow-creatures; of the poor, to be prudent, diligent, careful; and so on.

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Thus the several conditions and relations of individuals have their respective duties, in which they are to do the will of God, in "*fulfilling their course*;" but in each and all, the same care and attention ought to be maintained, to the one grand principle of which we have been speaking: one spirit should animate the whole;—one great end, under whatever variety of form and mode.

In the principles of human nature, and in the powers and faculties of our bodies and senses, there is a general agreement: yet no two individuals of the human race are alike; and the same variety exists in moral arrange-

ments. In the elements which compose the principle of holiness, the essential ingredients are the same; but when they come to be applied and embodied in a right course of action, they often seem widely different. Although the end is the same in all, yet the manner in which this end is viewed will be various; the rays of light, when blended in day, are simple and of a uniform colour; but when they are refracted through a prism, they exhibit all the colours of the rainbow. Such, my brethren, are the principles of holiness, and their diversified action in individuals: but, I repeat it, it is doing the will of God in all;—this, this is the object, the grand vital principle, that animates good men in all ages in all circumstances, of all classes and denominations. This is the true catholic spirit, which unites all the members of the true church; and in proportion as men live well, and live for eternity, this is the ruling and governing principle,—to glorify God.

II. We observe that there is a set and limited time allotted to that sphere and course of action: "There is an appointed time to man upon the earth." The course of man is not indeterminate, but has its limits, and they are narrow: "Man that is born of a woman, hath but a short time." If we had not the testimony of scripture on this point, it would be reasonable to conclude, from our observation of nature and the world around us, that the termination of human life is not left in uncertainty, but that it is directed by the wisdom of Him who himself is the Author of existence. If "a sparrow falleth not to the ground without his knowledge," much less can the death of a human creature take place without his interposition. Whether we fall premature victims to disease, or perish by what men call accident, or sink under the burdens of age, still it is according to the will of God, "whose counsels shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure."

This course is not only limited, but it is short. It is but a little time that we spend on earth: "Behold," says the Psalmist, "thou hast made my days as an handbreadth, and my years are as nothing before thee."

Whether we drop in infancy, from the cradle to the grave, or are cut off in youth; whether we attain to manhood, or even to old age; still we soon arrive at the boundary, we soon reach the end of our course, and often without passing through its intermediate stages. Thus, indeed, verifying the language, "Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth."

"The stream of human existence is rapid and impetuous; its waves follow each other in quick succession, and many are ingulfed almost as soon as they appear. Early in infancy the stream glides away like a summer brook, and leaves the fond parent mournfully to recall the pleasure he received in contemplating its unsullied purity and its playful meanders. Of those who set out with us in this journey of life, how many have disappeared from our side! what changes have taken place in the circle of our connexions since we began our course; how few can we now number of those with whom, in the early period of our lives, "we took sweet counsel!" Every year makes great changes. How great are the changes, my brethren, which have been made in the face of *this* congregation! Where are many of our friends in whom we delighted! They have finished their course; they have passed through the gate that opens into the invisible world; they have completed their probation, and appeared at the tribunal of Infinite Majesty; they have done with the converse of mortals, and have seen and heard things which it is impossible to utter; they have for ever finished their course.

III. Our happiness and our honour consist entirely in completing the course which God has assigned to us. In filling up the sphere of action which he has prescribed, and which his providence has marked out to us, there are two great mistakes into which we are liable to fall, in our views of this subject.

1. That there is some other happiness and honour than that which is to be found in fulfilling our course, or, in other words, occupying that sphere of duty which God hath been pleased to assign us. Some are looking, for their satisfaction, to the pleasures of sin; others to the

gratification which the world affords; some attach their notion of happiness to some external situation not yet found, and imagine it is to be met with there. Settle it in your minds, my dear friends, that the only happiness worth seeking,—that which will live in all circumstances, and abide the vicissitudes of life,—our only real and proper good,—consists in *fulfilling our course*, conforming to the divine will, imitating the divine perfections, obeying God's commands, walking in the light of his countenance, and being at peace with him. The prescription of this, as the way to happiness, is amongst the fixed laws of our nature: it is "founded amongst the floods, deeper than the foundations of the everlasting mountains." It forms a part of the constitution of heaven itself. It was amongst the original decrees promulgated by God in the silence of the universe. Eternal truth has declared, that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding." Could you ask the children of men, one by one, at the verge of life,—and especially those who have passed into eternity, —from the very commencement of time, whether they have been happy, and what constituted their happiness, there is not one who would not confess that the fear of the Lord was the only wisdom, and the knowledge of the Most High the supreme good.

If you could find another species of happiness, it would be what the wisdom of man has not yet discovered. You must look into some corner of the world which the eye of Omniscience has not penetrated; you must defy Omnipotence, and give the lie to eternal truth. "Where," says the Almighty, "is the place of wisdom?" All creatures testify that it is not in them. But God declares, "The fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom."

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Accursed, or abandoned, be that impiety, shut out from the universe be the shadow of that conception, which would represent happiness to be found in the depths, the heights, the breadths, or in any thing separate

from the service, the knowledge, and the love of the Eternal Being. This, "this is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." This fountain of water flows for the refreshment of the meanest peasant, as well as of the greatest monarch; this is an universal school of wisdom, into which all are invited. You may be happy, but there is but one way, and that is, "fulfilling your course," consulting the will of God, commending yourself to the guidance of his wisdom in a life of religion, living not to yourselves but unto God, seeking satisfaction in the mortification of every inclination which crosses his everlasting purposes: you may even "lose your life for his sake," and you "will find it."

2. The second mistake against which we should guard you, is that of supposing we should be able to conform ourselves to the will of God, and to our own sphere of action, better in some other state; and being therefore dissatisfied with that precise state in which his providence has placed us. The wisdom of each consists in fulfilling his *own* course. The course of John the Baptist was difficult, obstructed with afflictions, and beset with dangers: but he fulfilled it. How many objections might he have formed against the precise course assigned him! how many reasons might he have advanced for supposing that in some other sphere he might have glorified God more entirely! But he yielded himself to the wisdom of God.

Some are ready to suppose that they should more easily comply with the dictates of religion, and more easily surmount temptations, in a condition different from their own; that they should have acted better in another combination of circumstances; and thus venture, if I may so speak, to lay the blame of their defection and misconduct upon God, who has fixed the bounds of their habitation.

The poor may easily imagine, how amiably and liberally they should have acted if their lot had been cast among the rich; and the rich, on the other hand, how safely they should have been preserved from a variety

of snares, if they had been screened by the privacy of the poor. The young will ascribe their errors to the impetuosity so natural to their age; those who are more advanced are ready to imagine that if they enjoyed more leisure, and were not so entangled with the cares and perplexities of their active station, they should be better able to attend to the concerns of a future life. The aged are wishing for the energy and capacity of attention which belongs to youth: their time, they plead, is passed; it is too late for them to change.

But all these are great mistakes. Our true happiness is to be found in fulfilling our present course, conforming ourselves to the duties of that station in which we are placed, in consulting the will of God under the circumstances in which we actually are, and improving the opportunity which our condition affords. If we do not *now* love and fear the Supreme Being,—if we cannot *now* resist temptation, mortify corruption, and devote ourselves to the service of God,—if we *now* feel no resolution "to run the race that is set before us,"—we may be assured that a change of circumstances will not avail. It is not a change of state that we want, but a change of heart: the disease is within, in the state of our minds, the bent of our dispositions, which will follow us into another situation, produce the same effects, and place us at the same distance from happiness. What you want, my brethren, and what we all want, is the renovating principle of divine grace, that sanctifying principle within us; to have "the law of God written in our hearts," without which no other change will avail. The grace of God in the heart will preserve us in any and every situation, and in all circumstances will be fruitful of advantage to our souls: it will guide us and keep us humble in prosperity, cheer us in adversity, and render its discipline salutary; it will sustain and direct us in life, support us in death, and go with us into eternity. It was this that enabled Joseph to preserve his chastity in the midst of temptation; that supported Daniel in the very jaws of lions; and inspired the confidence of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in

"the flaming fiery furnace." This is the principle which brings God to our view in seasons of the greatest trial, by piercing the cloud of flesh, and enabling us to see him that is invisible to the eyes of sense. The man who possesses this principle will adorn an elevated condition, with humility; and a condition of obscurity and poverty, with integrity and resignation.

If, therefore, there be any persons in this assembly that feel a conviction of the importance of a religious life, and a course of right actions, but yet are sensible of a moral inability, let them have recourse to the fountain of divine grace. Come to Him who is eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame. Cast yourselves at the feet of the Saviour; be conscious of your weakness, misery, and guilt. Pray to Him who is the fountain of all light, that the beams of his grace may be communicated to you; that his light may shine into your hearts, to give unto you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

This will govern the heart as well as guide the understanding, direct the will, and regulate the affections: this will make you holy; this will subdue temptation; this will be an antidote against the infection of evil examples. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith; for who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" This will surmount the disorders of life, the fear of death, and conduct the soul to everlasting felicity.

Finally, my brethren, let each of us attach himself with more seriousness, alacrity, and fervour than ever, to the proper duties of his station; let each consider in what instances he fails to fulfil his course; let each examine himself, and see wherein he fails to observe "the good and perfect law of God." Let him discover "his easily besetting sin," and see how far this has perverted his course, and turned his affections from God.

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The time is coming when you will perceive that

there is no true wisdom to be found but in doing the will of God. The value of *time* is to be estimated by the opportunity which it gives us of laying up riches for *eternity*. He is the most steady pursuer of his own interest who has "laid up treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

Some of you, perhaps, have not even begun: you have done nothing yet for the glory of God; you have been living entirely to yourselves; and your lives, it may be, are approaching to a close. Begin then to be wise; reflect on what you have heard; and remember, it will be ratified by the impressions of a dying hour.

There are some present, perhaps, who are near to the end of their course, and have the satisfaction to reflect that they have had their conversation with God. Happy such persons, whatever their station in life may be! Let the consideration of your having so nearly fulfilled your course, make you more diligent and circumspect in what remains of it. In a very short time your conflict will be over, your corruptions will be slain. So near to victory, do not let the weapons of warfare fall out of your hands: "Be faithful unto death, and you shall receive a crown of life."

The memory of John the Baptist is perpetuated with honour, because he "fulfilled his course;" while that of Herod and Pontius Pilate are covered with infamy. Which of these characters will you imitate? Will you be among those whom God condescends to honour, to whom he will say, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of our Lord?" or will you now surround yourselves with a few sparks of worldly pleasure, and lie down in eternal darkness?

Whenever the gospel is preached, this alternative is set before you: the alternative of "shining like the sun for ever; or of awaking to shame and everlasting contempt." If there were no judgement-seat at which we must appear, we might have our election between peace of conscience. and the gratification of our desires. But our course here is a preparation for our course hereafter. Never

dissever in your minds a life of piety and a life of honour; there is no glory, no happiness, but in the love and service of God.

Hear the language of the apostle Paul, in the near prospect of a violent death: "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

Do you believe this? If you do not, you are not christians; you wear a mask. But, if you do, the conviction and confession of this truth will for ever be a source of torment to you, unless you now imitate the conduct of this apostle, give yourselves up to God, and embrace and pursue a holy and religious life in Christ Jesus.

IV.

CHRIST'S PRE-EXISTENCE, CONDESCENSION, AND EXALTATION.

[PREACHED AT THE CHAPEL IN DEAN-STREET, SOUTHWARK, JUNE 27, 1813.]

PHILIP. ii. 5—9.—*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him.**

IN this chapter, it is manifest from the context that the apostle is inculcating upon professors of the gospel a spirit of condescension and humility. "Let nothing," saith he, "be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than him-

* From the notes of W. B. Gurney, Esq., corrected, in a few cases, by comparison with the notes sent by six other friends. See Mr. Hall's own sketch of the argument, Vol. V. pp. 125—130.—ED.

self: look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

His intention is to enforce a disposition that enters very deeply into the lowly spirit of the gospel, an attention to the circumstances of others, a preference of their interests to our own, and a willingness to condescend to make great sacrifices of our own interest and gratification, of our own honour and advantage, to promote their good. It is that particular species of christian virtue and benevolence, which stands opposed to the tenacious maintenance of outward distinctions and dignities, that insists on all the honour and pre-eminence which we might be supposed to have a right to claim; and lays by its own advantage and honour for the sake of promoting the spiritual and temporal interests of our fellow-creatures, and especially of our fellow-christians.

Of this disposition he presents a striking example in the noble conduct of our Saviour, and in the great doctrines which are exhibited in his incarnation and converse in this world, as well as in the wonderful example of love and humility which he showed in becoming "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;" and he shows that by such a conduct as this it was that Jesus Christ rose in our nature to that inexpressible majesty with which he is at present invested. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Permit me to request your attention while I endeavour to set forth, in some imperfect measure, that example of great condescension and humility which is exhibited in the passage before us.

Now, in the idea of condescension, we must suppose a superior and an inferior,—one by whom that virtue is exercised, and another to whom it is shown. Where there is a perfect equality, there is no room for the exercise of this particular species of virtue; much less,

where a superior only is in question: for, though we may behave ourselves with the utmost propriety towards an equal or a superior, yet it is impossible that he should be the object of our condescension; this would involve a very great absurdity in language.

Whenever we speak of this species of excellency, it always implies that it is an inferior towards whom it is exerted; this is the necessary prerequisite for the exercise of this particular form of christian and moral virtue. In like manner, it is evident that a stoop, a descent from some dignity or previous elevation, is always supposed in the exercise of this branch of virtue. It always implies a resignation of some claim to a superior station, a foregoing of some advantage or preeminence. It is also necessary that such humiliation should be perfectly voluntary; a voluntary lowering of ourselves beneath the station which was previously occupied; a laying down of some advantage or dignity. There is a strong contrast supposed in a series of acts of condescension, or even in one, between the station we previously occupied and that in which we place ourselves. There is also an implied opposition between something we possess and something we resign, and the station to which we are reduced in consequence of resigning it,—the station to which we bring ourselves,—which forms a powerful opposition or contrast to what we might have assumed or previously possessed.

If our Saviour condescended, in the instance before us, it is manifest there must have been some previous elevation from which he descended—from which he passed to those acts which are here specified. It is necessary, in order to make out an example from our Saviour's case, to specify the particular circumstances here implied, which stand opposed to other circumstances: the elevation must come first, and the voluntary depression of himself must come afterwards. This is implied in the very nature of things. In all acts of condescension we must suppose the person who performs them to be acting in a manner perfectly voluntary; there must be no degradation in the case, nor any thing that occurs

by what we call chance or accident, nor yet by the usual arrangements of Providence: nothing that thus occurs can give any scope to the exercise of this disposition. Though the manner in which that depression may be borne may evince much patience and equanimity, and much of the proper spirit of christian resignation to the divine will, yet it cannot be called an act of condescension, if it is to be traced to the irresistible operations of divine grace, and much less still if it is the inevitable consequence of an irresistible law of nature. No one ever thought of praising the greatest sovereign on earth on the ground of his condescension in being a man, though this places him in the most essential particulars on a level with his subjects; a participation of human nature being a greater instance of equality than any circumstance that can produce inequality. No one, I say, would think of praising him on that account, because it is an effect of a law under which he was born, and which excludes his choice and volition.

But, not only is every instance of condescension supposed to involve the exercise of choice; but there must be no very forcible obligation, no such strong and palpable obligation to the act that expresses the condescension, as that the contrary of it would shock our moral feelings, would appear exceedingly unbecoming, and excite a great degree of moral disapprobation. Though condescension be a great ornament to the character of a christian, and springs from the principles of his religion, it is of a very different nature from the obligations of justice or even of humanity. It is of such a nature, indeed, that it is always supposed the not exercising it would not at the same time have destroyed all claim to virtuous and honourable conduct. If there be a forcible obligation to such sort of conduct, that conduct can never be entitled to the praise of eminent condescension. For example, nothing can be more plain than that it is the duty of every man to exercise humanity and strict justice towards all with whom he has to do. But, as the obligations to humanity, in cases of extreme distress, are

very forcible and strong, the neglect of them lays a person open to great blame; and the practice of them in some instances, in proportion to their great obligation, deprives the conduct of the title to high praise and commendation. In all cases the more palpable the obligation to conduct it, the less is there praiseworthy in complying with that obligation; and, on the other hand, the fainter the previous obligation is supposed to be, the stronger is the instance of virtue from attending to so comparatively feeble a sense of obligation.

Now, it is manifest, that if our Saviour be proposed as a pattern, it must be in some instance wonderfully condescending and humble, different from what might have been expected; that we must not merely look for what is virtuous and worthy, but for that which is so extraordinary and singular as to justify his being exhibited, in this part of his conduct, as our example. If he be proposed as an imitable model of condescension, it must be for the exercise of this virtue in a very eminent and extraordinary degree; for nothing else can justify his being held up as a pattern to all ages. If, while it was imitable in its kind, it had not surpassed all comparison in degree, it would then have excited a vicious competition,—it would have contradicted the very purpose for which it was produced, which was to set our Saviour inexpressibly high in our esteem, and excite us to emulate his conduct, as far as we are able, with the most entire consciousness that we can only make an imperfect approach to it. We must look, then, for some very extraordinary instance of condescension in our Lord, something which must strike all eyes, something which cannot be accounted for without supposing inexpressible love in the breast of the Saviour, and such an infinite compassion towards a lost world as must place him beyond all comparison, or even the power of being imitated, in this respect.

Now, there are two ways of interpreting this passage of scripture; and these remarks have been made to enable us to judge which is the best interpretation, which best corresponds with the intention of the sacred writer.

If there be any doubt about the meaning of the text separately taken, and it is capable of two distinct interpretations, that must be allowed to be the just one which best corresponds with the purpose for which the passage is produced; that which furnishes the argument for which the passage is brought, that which most illustrates the particular moral duty intended to be inculcated, must be confessed to be the true one, in opposition to that which does not inculcate that duty. It is allowed that an attention to the scope of a passage, and a consideration of the purpose for which it was written, is one of the most certain guides.

In interpreting this passage and in determining which is to be preferred of contrary interpretations, you must consider, not merely what meaning the words may bear, but which of the meanings proposed best corresponds with the intention of the inspired writer, by exhibiting our Saviour as a marvellous example of condescension. If there be a capacity of putting another construction on the words without any great force or violence to them, which, at the same time, does not exhibit a striking example of condescension,—one which deprives our Saviour of the place he here occupies as a pattern, on the supposition of which it becomes difficult to conceive of any condescension at all remarkable,—we are justified in setting aside that interpretation; not simply because it appears less natural in itself, but because it is quite unsuitable to the place, by destroying and invalidating the purpose for which it is brought.

I shall briefly propose to you the opposite interpretations which have been given to the passage before us.

First, then, let us take that of those who deny the divinity of Christ and the incarnation, and, of consequence, all the doctrines connected with them; their interpretation is as follows. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God;" that is, say they, being possessed of extraordinary miraculous powers, "thought it not robbery to be equal with God;" which they interpret, whether justly or not I shall not now inquire, *did not eagerly catch at,*

or was not eager to maintain, the idea of any likeness to God, or equality with God,—" but made himself of no reputation;" that is, say they, made himself poor, or reduced himself to a state of poverty and meanness;—" and took upon him the form of a servant," which word they interpret *slave*, because, if the term servant stood, it is plain there could be no instance of condescension; they therefore consider him as subjecting himself to the abject state of a slave;—" and was made in the likeness of man," which say they, is like common men, not distinguishing himself by outward distinctions, but placing himself on a level with the meanest part of mankind;—" and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Now this is the interpretation of those who would set aside the pre-existence of Christ in a state of majesty previously to his entrance into our world, and the obvious argument that hence results in favour of condescension from the preeminent dignity and glory of the Saviour. But let us consider whether this interpretation can possibly stand, consistently with the prerequisites we have before mentioned; whether the instances here adduced can possibly exhibit any striking example of condescension on the part of the Saviour. " Being in the form of God," on the supposition of its meaning his being possessed of miraculous powers, must be the only elevation he possessed above common men. This was his great distinction: but *this* he never laid aside. Here, therefore, instead of his conduct exhibiting a great example of condescension, he never came down from the station he occupied; he never lost it for a moment; for the exercise of miraculous powers continued, through the whole of his ministry, with increasing splendour and advantage. With respect to the translation I have adverted to, and which I shall not now combat, because the requisite criticisms appear to me very unfit for a popular assembly, let us take it that he did not eagerly catch at, or was not eager to maintain his equality and likeness to God, still I affirm that this is not an instance of *condescension*, because there is upon

creatures a forcible obligation not to contend for equality with God; and although it would be extremely criminal not to comply with it, yet there can be no high degree of virtue in abstaining from so atrocious a degree of guilt. For a subject to refrain from assuming the dignity of sovereign would excite no admiration; no one would think of highly praising his virtue because he did not raise a standard of rebellion against his sovereign. In proportion to the force of the obligation to abstain from such pretensions, in the same degree is such conduct considered only in a negative way; that is, as exempted from censure but not entitled highly to praise; in some cases, indeed, not at all. But the apostle brings it as a proof of condescension and humility, that Christ Jesus did not eagerly affect, as they say, an equality with God, or did not *catch at it.* How can that be an instance of *condescension?* The example must surpass, I apprehend, all human comprehension. "But made himself of no reputation," or, as the expression literally is, *emptied himself.* Emptied himself of what? And, it is added, "took upon him the form of a servant." We might suppose that his emptying himself must mean his divesting himself, as the expression signifies of something before possessed, of some distinction and glory before mentioned; and the only one, even in the esteem of our adversaries, is the form of God; but, upon their supposition, he did not empty himself of it all; he retained it; for, during his whole ministry, he exercised miraculous powers, and never more so than in the resurrection of Lazarus, which immediately preceded and accelerated his death. But, the text says, "he made himself of no reputation:" you may suppose that the writer is going to tell us for what reason he took upon himself the form of a servant. Here the "form of God" being mentioned before, it is manifest that the "form of a servant" is the intended antithesis. But, upon the supposition of Jesus Christ having no existence before he came into our world, there can be no interpretation given to it, unless we interpret *servant*, *slave*, and suppose that he degraded himself to the service of a common slave. But, if

Jesus Christ acted the part of a slave, or sustained the character of a slave, it must be either in relation to God, or to man. With respect to men, it is manifest he did not act the part of a slave, he never sustained that capacity at all, much less took upon him that character permanently; he never was in captivity: it was not then his relation to society. With respect to his heavenly Father, it cannot be supposed that it can be applied to his service to God; nothing can be so absurd: no service which the Divine Being can be supposed to prescribe to an accountable creature can be viewed in a degrading light. And where is there any example of the term slave signifying a very mean servant of God? Are not the angels themselves styled the servants of God? Does not Paul call himself the servant of God? Does not the angel in the Apocalypse style himself the fellow-servant of John? Would our very adversaries themselves so exceedingly disfigure the language of scripture as to style these the *slaves* of God? What can it then be for, but to answer a purpose perfectly palpable without being at the same time able to assign any just and proper meaning to the term? "And was made in the likeness of men:" here it is represented as an act of great condescension in our Saviour that he was made in the likeness of men; but how could he assume any other appearance than that of a man? how could he fail to appear in that character, with no other attribute belonging to him than that of a human being? "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Now, these expressions evidently are intended to introduce a proof of our Saviour's great condescension and humility; but none of them answer this purpose in the least degree, but on the supposition of there being some previous dignity or rank from which he descended. There is no contrast, on the supposition of mere humanity, between this and the previous state; there is no forcible or palpable opposition between what he became and what he was; he always *was* a servant, he always *was* in the likeness of man, could be nothing but man;

and yet his being so is represented as a marvellous instance of condescension and humility in the Redeemer! On the supposition that Jesus Christ did not exist before he came into our world, the order of things is inverted; for the dignity of our Saviour, his elevation, came *afterwards*, upon this supposition, and his depression came *first:* he had no elevation of an earthly kind at all from which he could condescend, and he is the greatest example, if he were no more than man, of a person raising himself to great dignity and authority from the meanest and most abject beginning. No "form of God" was perceived in him in the commencement of his ministry. He possessed miraculous powers, it is true; but he possessed them to the end, and these he never lost. "My Father worketh, and I work." Upon the supposition of his mere humanity, the contrast is of a different kind; he is the most wonderful example of a person rising from the most obscure beginning, commencing in lowly circumstances, and ascending to grandeur.

But if we take the expressions according to their obvious and popular import, they afford the most striking illustration of the purpose of the apostle in exhibiting the condescension and humility of the Saviour. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Here the form of God and the form of a servant are contrasted with each other; and as the form of a servant is universally understood as acknowledging that he was a servant, what can we suppose the being in the form of God to mean, but that he was God; though that may not be its only meaning? He is said to have taken upon himself the form of a servant; here try the meaning of those who oppose the divinity of Christ, that he was not eager to catch at or to retain the likeness of God; and then, upon the supposition of his being the Son of God, possessing the divine nature, and uniting himself to mortal flesh, you will find that the latter perfectly corresponds with the

intention of the apostle. And his emptying himself, and taking upon him the form of a servant, is, indeed, a great instance of condescension, on the supposition of his being a Son; for there is a visible contrast between the being a son and a servant, which the apostle observes when he remarks, that "though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." There is also, upon this supposition, a plain meaning assigned to the whole, the words of existence differing from the words of assumption. "Who BEING in the form of God, MADE himself of no reputation, TOOK upon himself the form of a servant, was MADE in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he *humbled himself.*" For, here we have the state he formerly possessed expressed by the word BEING; and the word MADE, signifying that he became so by being made so; agreeably to what the apostle John says, "The Word was with God, and the Word was God;" and further, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."—The same apostle, Paul, expresses the reason of his assuming a nature that did not belong to him, an inferior nature, "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." But what possible contrast of this nature can be found, upon the supposition of Christ's mere humanity? Where was there any descent from the form of God? And why should that which could not be avoided, which was not voluntary, be expressed in the way it is—"Took upon himself the form of a servant," "humbled himself," and so on, when the very nature of things, the universal law of nature, rendered it impossible for him to be other than a mere man, and, consequently, a servant of the Most High God?

The doctrine of Christ's humiliation and incarnation is expressed in the most forcible manner, and worthy of our most attentive admiration and adoration. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself;" he *still* humbled himself. He was not satisfied with being

found in fashion as a man, which was a wonderful act of condescension: he was not satisfied with taking upon him the form of a servant; he not merely assumed a very low station in society; but he still humbled himself; he descended lower than the mere level of human nature required; he descended deeper and deeper, and was not contented till he had reached the very bottom of humiliation, till he "became obedient unto death." Nay, even that was not sufficient; there was one death more ignominious, more painful, more replete with agony and shame, than any other; and for the purpose, the glorious purpose, of his coming into our world, he selected that death, he determined to die that death, that very death; and made that his peculiar province in which he should appear, to the destruction of our spiritual enemies, and the conquest of the powers of darkness. "He became obedient unto death, *even the death of the cross.*" It was from this cross, which was the lowest step to which he could possibly descend, that he arose to his crown; it was from thence that "he ascended up on high," that he was elevated to the right hand of God; that there might be exhibited in his person the most wonderful contrast of the original dignity which he laid aside, then of the scene of shame and suffering which he endured, and afterwards of the majesty and glory with which he invested the nature in which he suffered. He first descended from the throne to the cross; and then, in order that he might take up our nature with him, and make us partakers of his glory, he carried a portion of that nature from the cross to the throne, ascended into heaven, and from thence gives a portion of the benefits of it by the outpouring of his Spirit, by the preaching of the Gospel, and the saving of innumerable multitudes of them that believe; and all this in consonance with the purposes of God, whom it became, as the Great Legislator, "in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

There is only one expression more on which I shall make a remark; and that is, that it is not said he *became* a servant, or *became* a man: all this is *implied;*

the form of expression is different. Nor is it here asserted that he was God, though this is strongly implied. But it is thus expressed: "Who, being in the *form* of God, took upon him the *form* of a servant, and was made in the *likeness* of men." Though this plainly implies that Jesus Christ was God, yet the form of expression, no doubt, includes something more; it is intended to express a distinct idea from his being called God; and it appears to me to correspond exactly with the design of the apostle, for his design was to contrast our Lord's state at different times. He had assumed a form under the old dispensation wherein he appeared on various occasions, in various ways, or in different manifestations. When Joshua was about to enter on his war with the Canaanites, he observed a majestic and glorious personage standing over against him, with his sword drawn in his hand; and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay, but as Captain of the hosts of the Lord am I come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the Captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy." The same command God gave from the burning bush. And in Ezekiel you find, "one in the form of the Son of Man seated on a throne," with a sapphire firmament; and Jesus Christ is represented as distinct from the Father, presenting himself to the Father; so that he is said by the apostle Paul to have been tempted of the Israelites in the wilderness. He manifested himself, but he manifested himself in the form of God, with a majesty and glory suited to his work. Yet he laid aside that form; he divested himself of it, and took upon him the form of a servant, a human form; and not merely a human form, but he humbled himself still more, and became obedient unto death. He was *found* in fashion as a man: it was a wonderful discovery, an astonishing spectacle in the view of angels, that he who was in the form of God, and adored from eternity,

should be made in fashion as a man. But why is it not said that he WAS *a man?* For the same reason that the apostle wishes to dwell upon the *appearance* of our Saviour, not as excluding the reality, but as exemplifying his condescension. His being in the form of God did not prove that he was not God, but rather that he was God, and entitled to supreme honour. So, his assuming the form of a servant, and being in the likeness of man, does not prove that he was not man, but, on the contrary, includes it; at the same time including a manifestation of himself, agreeably to his design of purchasing the salvation of his people, and dying for the sins of the world by his sacrificing himself upon the cross. Besides, there is a peculiar propriety in these terms, *fashion* and *likeness* of man, though not intended to exclude his proper humanity; for there is a high and glorious distinction in the humanity of Christ as contrasted with every other: every other man is tainted with sin, and partakes of original corruption. But when the angel addressed the Virgin Mary, he said, "That holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." From that contagion which belongs to the human race he was exempted by a miraculous conception. Every other man possesses two parts, body and spirit; but this divine man, this "God-man," consisted of three component parts, a soul, a body, and that Eternal Word, or *Logos*, which formed also a part. He is represented as taking upon himself this form, and "being found in fashion as a man," exalted to the adoration of the universe, which beheld the greatest wonder that ever was exhibited to the world, in Him that was God becoming man; for if it be a wonder that God should *make* man, how much more astonishing that God should *become* man! "*Wherefore* God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name:" this is the reason. If you ask, how came a portion of human nature thus to be dignified? how came dust and ashes, (for such was a component part of the Saviour,) to be placed at the right hand of God, in the midst of the inaccessible glory? It was because in that nature he suf-

fered, that he was humbled and bowed to the cross; and this was the way in which he ascended to his crown. What an example is this of the force of humility and the efficacy of condescension; of the wonderful power which, according to the rules and laws of the kingdom of God, condescension, patient suffering, and lowliness have, in raising us to true dignity. But thus did the Saviour ascend to the crown.

Be it remembered, "He *became* obedient." There was, therefore, no necessity to obey at all. But he assumed, voluntarily, a nature which made him capable of suffering: and he obeyed in that nature even unto death, "the death of the cross;" in order that he might make it becoming the character of God, as a Moral Governor, to grant pardon to a whole race of apostate and guilty, but believing and penitent, creatures.

And yet we are told that Christ is not to be called a Saviour exclusively; we are told that Paul, and Peter, and others, shared in the glory of saving mankind. Nay, we are told that all this argument of the apostle in the text, conclusive as it is, both from the words and phrases which are employed, and from the disposition in the mind of Christ which the whole of the reasoning implies,—that all this, instead of proving the pre-existence and divinity of Christ, proves nothing of the kind. Indeed, farther, the leader of the unitarians in the present day declares that no words can ever be clear enough to prove to him that Christ is God; and that if he should find any such words in the scripture, they would only serve to weaken the evidence of the truth of the christian revelation, and would not convince him that the statement was true. With such men we can have no communion. Such a spirit shuts up all the avenues to truth and conviction; nay, it is the height of arrogance and practical infidelity in a creature like man. For it not only leads to error,—dangerous, fatal, destructive error, growing out of a spirit diametrically opposite to that inculcated in the text,—but it goes to the frightful length of setting itself above revelation; of limiting the wisdom of the Infinite Mind; by affirming that the revealed de-

clarations, concerning the incomprehensible God, cannot be true; thus subverting the whole foundation of faith.

Be careful then, my brethren, that "the same mind be in *you* which was also in Christ Jesus." If you wish to be great in the kingdom of God, go in the same path. If you wish to possess true dignity, lower yourself. If you wish to reign with him, you must also suffer with him: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. We cannot follow the Saviour without pursuing the same path; we must tread in the same steps; "If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me;" and "Where I am, there shall also my servants be;" for "He that honoureth me, him will my Father honour."

This wonderful mystery of our redemption is of the most practical tendency; not only because it exhibits such affecting views of the evil of sin, and of the price of our redemption, but because it shows the connexion between humility and true dignity. The glory of the cross consists in this—that it is the way to the crown. The christian religion is distinguished from all others, by turning men's minds from aspiring to dignity here, inducing them to forego their own good, to cast away their lives, to make shipwreck of all but faith, to give up themselves to God's will entirely, to follow wherever the Saviour leads, and to press into the celestial kingdom through agonies, and crosses, and torments—through every possible obstacle. This is the way the Saviour went, and it is in this way we must expect to be partakers of his glory. "Let *this* mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

The time forbids my enlarging upon this subject, by pressing the practical conclusion from it in its different branches; but I cannot close without urging upon all, "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."—"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is one of the first principles of our religion, one of the elementary truths of christianity, that "He who was rich for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." "Let the same mind be in

you."—You who are possessed of property, devote *that* in the way it becomes the servants of so divine a Master. Consider the use *he* would have made of that portion of this world's good, which he declined as an example of patience and humility. Consider to what purpose *he* employed his heavenly powers; and to the same purpose employ your natural advantages and civil resources. When did he employ that word, which commanded angels and devils, and subdued the very elements of nature, for the purposes of ostentation? When were his words any thing but spirit and life? When did they operate to any purpose but to communicate health to the dying, purity to the guilty, pardon to the sinful, and salvation and benefits to all around him? "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." You possess a portion of this world's good; if you are true christians, you will consider this as belonging to your Lord, as belonging to the poor of his people, as belonging to the world—to all but yourselves, and will consider all as having a much greater property in it, morally considered, than yourselves; you will regard yourselves as the stewards of God, and the most unjust persons (though not amenable to any human tribunal, but to your Saviour and your Lord) if you employ them to any other purposes than those of beneficence. If you deem it peculiarly honourable to die rich, and to leave estates afterwards to your children, to have them "called by your own name," that name will be a name of infamy. No, my brethren, be assured such a mistaken course will *cancel* your name, will blot it out of the Lamb's book of life for ever. Let, then, "the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." And those who are elevated in rank; let them not use it merely for the purpose of levying homage from men, of making a vain show, of appearing in artificial splendour. And those who are possessed of influence; let them use it also for the glory of God, and the good of their fellow-creatures. Never was any one so exalted as our Saviour, and never did any one make such a use of his exaltation. He shrouded it in the deep veil of humanity, he concealed

it from the view of the world. None but the piercing eye of faith, illuminated by the Spirit of God, could behold it. The world knew him not. "*We* beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Do *you* then, my brethren, employ your influence in that manner. Never make it the means of keeping at a distance from you the poor, the distressed, and the afflicted. "Mind not high things. but condescend to men of low estate." Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Do not dwell on the contemplation of your own greatness; do not separate yourselves from your fellow-creatures. Do not suffer yourselves to be hedged in and fenced round from them, by the riches of this world; but communicate them to others, and pray for the blessing of God upon the right use of them, that they may turn to incorruptible riches and righteousness; that these perishing riches and this evil mammon may not seduce you from the right way to the everlasting mansions. If you are not faithful over a little, how shall you be faithful over much? and if you are not faithful to that which is the property of God, who lends it to you for a time, but gives to none a discretionary use of it, how shall he give you "that crown of righteousness that fadeth not away;" that glory which will be a part of your nature, which will satisfy your souls, and make you great, and happy, and blessed, to all eternity?

"Let nothing be done," saith the apostle, "through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Let men learn of Jesus Christ that humility which disposed him to behave as if he had been the lowest and meanest of all. Our blessed Saviour was not unconscious of his high dignity, but he knew that it was important to exhibit *the spirit* of his religion in great humility. When he knew that he was shortly to go to his Father, and that, "the Father had given all things into his hands, then he took a towel, and girded himself, and washed his disciples' feet." When he was about to take possession of universal em-

pire, and heaven, earth, and hell, were to be submitted to him,—when he knew that he was just about to be crowned with immortal glory, after he had sustained the divine frown for the salvation of men, even "*then* he took a towel, and girded himself, and washed his disciples' feet, saying, Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am; if I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet,"—to condescend to the lowest office of christian beneficence and love.

Again, "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," in his entrance into the world: consider with what sympathy he regarded mankind, and what drew him from his exalted seat of majesty on high. How did he look upon a distant race far removed from him, and compassionate their misery! how did he, as it were, for a season annihilate himself! how did he take their curse upon him, and invest himself with their nature! he looked upon them with unutterable and tender compassion: "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." You live among men dead in trespasses and sins; you see nations innumerable sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. Consider what compassion actuated the Saviour's breast in coming down from heaven to pay the price of our redemption, to make peace with God, and bring in everlasting righteousness. What compassion touched his holy and beneficent mind, inducing him to die a sacrifice for the sins of his people! Do you have the same mind; compassionate the distant and miserable children of men involved in darkness. Carry your eyes to the remotest borders of the earth; and be not satisfied until the whole earth "is full of the knowledge of the Lord," till all men have seen the salvation of God. Let no distance of place, no difference of circumstances, prevent your exerting yourselves to diffuse the knowledge of Him "who made himself of no reputation." Let nothing prevent your feeling a participation of the common nature. God has provided for sympathy by making you "of one blood;" so that you must act contrary to the laws of na-

ture if you do not sympathize with your fellow-creatures. "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus;" then will the religion of Christ extend itself far and wide. Let this mind distinguish the followers of Christ; and all men will confess that God is among you of a truth. You will be all of one heart and one mind; you will be actuated by such a desire as will render you beneficial to all your fellow-creatures, as will make you the "light of the world," and the "salt of the earth." Then would iniquity stop its mouth, and so would you confound infidelity and impiety. Seriously study the doctrine of the cross, place yourselves there, consider what are the morals of the cross; consider what are the dispositions the cross inculcates; what is the influence of the fact that you are purchased, redeemed, and, by his Spirit, prepared for a seat at the right hand of God; what the everlasting advantages which accrue from being purchased by such blood, saved by such humility; what the doctrines of the Saviour's incarnation, sacrifice, and ascent to heaven, inculcate on christian hearts. It opens a fountain of love, of wonderful and inexhaustible compassion: and it is at that fountain of love we should study: for we shall never be truly happy till we *do* study the spirit of our religion at the foot of the cross. We should enter more deeply into the dying love of Christ, that we may "comprehend, with all saints, what is the height, and depth, and breadth, and length, of that love which passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fulness of God."

Finally, my brethren, we see here the great and intimate connexion between the practical principles of religion, and the great doctrines of christianity. Take away the incarnation of our Lord, and his sacrifice upon the cross, and these sublime and glorious truths lose all their meaning: this great example dwindles into nothing, if we lose sight of Christ's dignity, glory, and humility. It is this which renders his sacrifice of infinite value. It is this which renders his cross so inexpressibly awful and so deeply interesting. It is this which makes it so infinitely precious to his people. The cross

of Jesus Christ is the appropriate, the appointed rendezvous of heaven and earth;* the meeting-place between God and the sinner: thus the principles of the cross become the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. Deprive Jesus Christ of his dignity, deprive his person of divinity and pre-existence as the Son of God, and all these momentous truths dwindle into inexpressible futilities. Doctrines meant to warm and kindle our hearts fill us with perplexity. When we look for a glorious mystery, we find nothing but the obscurity and perplexity that make men rack their invention to find out the meaning of those passages which it is plain the apostle poured forth in a stream of exquisite affection and delight.

But "we have not so learned Christ:" Hold fast the cross of Christ. You who are not acquainted with the christian religion, come to Jesus Christ by faith; cast yourselves upon the dying love of the Saviour; receive him by faith. And those of you who *have* received the Saviour, study him more and more; impress still more and more upon your minds the lessons which Christ crucified teaches. This is the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation; and by means of this only shall we grow up into conformity to our blessed Lord and Saviour: which God grant, of his infinite mercy. Amen.

V.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

[PREACHED AT KETTERING, IN JUNE, 1813.]

PSALM cxlv. 11—"*They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power.*"†

THE absolute dominion of God is a subject worthy to be celebrated by all creatures; it is the frequent theme

* See Vol. V. pp. 216—221. ED.

† Printed from the notes of the Rev. S. Hillyard, of Bedford. For Mr. Hall's own notes, see Vol. V. pp. 221—227.

of praise in the Scriptures, which were dictated by the Holy Ghost.

But there is another kingdom which God has intrusted to the hands of his well-beloved Son—the mediatorial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the subject of the most exalted praise, and of the most glorious prophecies of the Old Testament, as well as of all the histories, doctrines, and revelations of the New Testament. This is styled the kingdom of heaven, and of God: it is the kingdom which the God of heaven has set up among men upon the earth. It is contrasted with the kingdom of the power of darkness; and its subjects are described as being translated out of the kingdom of darkness, into "the kingdom of God's dear Son,"* which is a kingdom of "marvellous light."

Whether the Psalm before us is designed, in particular, to celebrate this dispensation of the Son of God, I shall not now inquire: but as the kingdom of Christ is so conspicuous an object in both Testaments and is the only one among men by whose government their happiness can be secured, it cannot be improper from the words before us, to direct your attention, on the present occasion, to some particulars relating to the nature, extent, and durability of its glory.

I. The glory of this kingdom is manifested in its origin. It had its origin in infinite mercy and grace. It was the object of the divine and eternal purposes of the Father; an object to which all other purposes were subservient. It entered into the councils of the Eternal before the foundation of the world was laid. It was a grand design, intended to include the reign of God over the mind and heart of man; a purpose to establish a kingdom, the subjects of which should be raised to be partakers of the same nature as their Sovereign.

In order to establish this kingdom, it was necessary that the Son of God should become incarnate; the "Mighty God" must be a "child born unto us," that he might have the "government laid upon his shoulders,"

* Colos. i. 13.

and be the "Prince of Peace" to his redeemed people. God purposed to have his tabernacle among men, and to be their God; but this he could not do consistently with his truth and holiness, till an atonement was made to his law in the death of the person of his Son. The institution of sacrifices under the law intimated that "without the shedding of blood there was no remission;"* their insufficiency evidenced the necessity of a sacrifice of transcendent value; and this was often indicated by the prophets: "Then said he, Sacrifices and offerings thou didst not desire; lo, I come to do thy will, O God."† Thus the foundation of the kingdom was laid in the incarnation and atonement of the Son of God; a foundation proportionate to the grandeur and beauty of the edifice that was to be erected.

The doctrines of the gospel were, and are, the grand instruments in the hand of the Lord Jesus for bringing souls into subjection to his sceptre. The King must ride forth conquering and to conquer; all his subjects must be rescued and subdued: but what a battle is that in which he engages! "Every battle among men is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood," but this is "with burning and with fire." The warfare is entirely spiritual; it is carried on by the light of truth and the burning of conviction. The mere testimony of the gospel, in the mouth of the witnesses, produced effects more wonderful than any that were ever produced by the violence of the sword: by this the powers of darkness were shaken, their votaries confounded, their temples deserted, and their oracles silenced. Heavenly truth combated with sophistry and error, and gained a decisive victory, though her opponents were armed with all the persecuting powers of the kingdoms of this world. The Psalmist, foreseeing the contest, said, long since, "Gird thy sword on thy thigh, O most Mighty, and in thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness."‡ These have had no

* Heb. ix. 22. † Psalm xl. 6—8.
‡ Psalm xlv. 3, 4.

share in the extension of human dominion, but were the principal instruments that were used in the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. To these, in his hand, and by his Spirit, the success of the gospel is to be ascribed: by these, his people became a "willing people in the day of his power;" a conquered, yet a willing people: led captive, yet obedient. This is a glorious manner of raising a kingdom, worthy of him who is a spirit, and who reigns by spiritual and intellectual means in the hearts of his people. Could we trace the means by which God has established his empire, it would fill our minds with admiration, and our lips with praise: then should we "speak of the glory of his kingdom, and talk of his power."

II. The glory of the kingdom of Christ is manifested in the manner and spirit of its administration.

The last words of David describe the manner of administering this government;—"The anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain."*

The most essential quality in the administration of any government is justice; and justice is most conspicuous in this administration. The Sovereign confers no benefits on his friends, and inflicts no punishments on his enemies, but what are consistent with righteousness. "With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."† He will render to each of his subjects, not *for* their works, yet, *according*

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 1—4. † Isaiah xi. 4, 5.

to their works. He establishes his holy law as the rule of their conduct, and makes use of such motives to excite them to holy and spiritual obedience as are suitable to their nature, both as rational and as fallen creatures. As the law was first employed, so it is still used for conviction, for alarming the consciences even of the redeemed and the regenerate, and to excite to repentance and to renewed exercises of reformation.

The administration of this kingdom is also benign and gracious—it is indeed a kingdom of grace. The throne is a throne of grace, and the sceptre is a sceptre of grace. He revealeth his grace, which is his glory; and thus he captivates the hearts of his people. He, in his great kindness, invites to him all that are athirst, all that are "weary and heavy laden,"* and assures them that they shall find rest and refreshment. "He delivers the poor when he cries, the needy, and him that hath no helper." He is the husband of the widow, and the father of the fatherless, in his holy habitation. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst," he graciously says, "I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water."†

In earthly kingdoms, the subjects are governed by general laws, which must necessarily be very inadequate to the variety of cases and occurrences. It is impossible that the multiplicity of actions, and all their individual shades, should be at all times considered and distinguished: hence has arisen the proverb, "*Summum jus, summa injuria.*" But our King is intimately acquainted with all hearts, and, being present in all places, he can apply his acts to individual examples, and appropriate smiles and frowns to each, as if there were no other beings that participated in his attention. In human administrations, the law extends only to outward acts; it

* Matt. xi. 28. † Isaiah xli. 17, 18.

relates only to objects of sense; insomuch that a pure spirit, disengaged from the body, is free from its sanction: but the kingdom of heaven is a spiritual one—it extends to the heart; it relates not to meats and drinks, but it is a kingdom that is "within you,"* and relates to "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."† It is founded on communion with Christ: by his Spirit Christ lives in his members; their souls, whether in the body or out of the body, are always in his hands; he is Lord, both of the dead and the living; he adjusts himself to all cases, through every part of his vast empire. In earthly kingdoms, the utmost that can be done is, to lay down rules, to prescribe laws, and to sanction by rewards or penalties; but Jesus Christ can write his laws on the hearts of his people. "They are engraven, not on stone, but on fleshly tables."‡ He knows how to speak to the heart; and "they know his voice, and follow him; but a stranger they will not follow, for they know not the voice of a stranger."§

It is justly considered a high excellency in a ruler, that he is disinterested, that he pursues no interest of his own, apart from the general good of the empire: this is the very flower of royalty; and those who have thus distinguished themselves have been justly considered as the greatest benefactors of mankind; they have been obeyed and loved while they lived, and foolishly idolized and worshipped when they died. But never was any one so disinterested as the King of Zion, who laid down his life for his people, while they were yet enemies. He wields the sceptre of universal dominion: he chains death and hell, quells the devils, and overrules all things for the good of his church. Though he sits at the right hand of God, he could not enjoy even that station were it to continue a solitary one. "Father," says he, "I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory."‖ "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that

* Luke xvii. 21. † Rom. xiv. 17. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 3.
§ John x. 4, 5. ‖ John xvii. 24.

where I am, there ye may be also."* He blends the deepest condescension with the highest majesty. He is a lion against the enemies of his people, but to them he appears as a "lamb in the midst of the throne." The whole of his history is a history of the sacrifice of selfish feelings. The glory of the Father, and the good of man; these engaged his heart, these brought him from heaven, these regulated all his actions and sufferings; and he rested not till he could say, "Father, I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."† Well may we "speak," then, "of the glory of his kingdom, and talk of his power."

III. The glory of the kingdom of Christ appears in the character of his subjects.

The character of a people for greatness and for virtue constitutes part of the glory of any kingdom; and it must not be omitted here. The Divine Ruler will derive much of his glory from the change that he has wrought in his people. "This people have I formed for myself," says he; "they shall show forth my praise."‡ As this change is derived from above, there is no foundation for boasting, yet the change is not the less real: it is the communication of the Saviour's image and spirit: and, when he comes, he will "be glorified in his saints."

I cannot enter largely into a description of the subjects of this kingdom, nor is it necessary; but a few observations may be made, with propriety and advantage.

1. These subjects are enlightened: they have just conceptions of things; they are delivered out of darkness, which envelopes the rest of mankind, as the children of Israel had light in the land of Goshen when the habitations of the Egytians were in darkness. They see things as they are: they see them, in some measure, as they are seen by Jesus Christ, the "true Light;" they form right estimates of objects, as they are holy or sinful, temporal or eternal; they reckon that all worldly treasures and delights are nothing and

* John xiv. 3. † John xvii. 4. ‡ Isaiah xliii. 21.

vanity, when compared with the spiritual and everlasting riches and pleasures of Christ and his kingdom.

2. The subjects of this kingdom are renewed: the Spirit of God changes their heart; they are made, imperfectly, yet truly holy; they have a principle in them that aims at perfection; their characters are mixed, but the best part struggles against the worst, and will finally triumph. It is in this kindom that patience, purity, humility, faith, and love to God and men, reside. Whatever of true holiness is to be found on earth, here you must find it; "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness."* But these are renewed after the image of God: there is something divine impressed upon their characters; they have a principle in them that comes from God and leads to God, and inspires their souls with earnest longings after him. "My soul followeth hard after God."† "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee."‡ They have been reclaimed from their revolt, and are truly loyal; they are "called, chosen, and faithful." From their wanderings they have "returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls;" they lament that they ever were his enemies, that they ever lived at a distance from him; and it is now their sincere desire to obey him while they live, and to breathe out their souls in his service.

3. The subjects of this kingdom have in them a preparation for perfect blessedness. They that do not belong to Christ are disqualified for heaven, but those that belong to him have the elementary preparation for that blissful state; they have that which renders them meet "to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." They are not entirely cured, it is true, of all the infection of sin; the venom of the "old serpent" is not expelled: but they are under a restorative process; they are under the method of cure; they are taking the medicine which is of sovereign efficacy. All the love and joy that glow with celestial fervour before the throne of

* 1 John v. 19. † Psalm lxiii. 8 ‡ Psalm lxxiii. 25.

the Heavenly Majesty, is only the consummation of seeds like those which are sown in the hearts of believers: "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."* They are sown in their hearts: and when that which is sown, or is to be sown, shall be matured, Jesus Christ will present unto himself "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."† And what a spectacle will this be! how will the saints themselves be astonished at their attainments! It will require an eternity to know ourselves, much more to know the Fountain whence all these beauties and glories have been derived. Then, indeed, shall we "speak of the glory of his kingdom, and talk of his power."

IV. The glory of the kingdom of Christ is manifest in the privileges that are attached to it.

The privileges are transcendently great, far beyond our comprehension. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath laid up for them that love him;"‡ but the Spirit of God, which searcheth all things, in some measure manifests them to us by his word, and gives us a taste for them in our experience.

1. Peace is a peculiar blessing of this kingdom. The Ruler is called, "The Prince of Peace." Of the increase of his kingdom and peace, there shall be no end. This begins in reconciliation with God; the healing of the great breach which sin has made. With respect to his people, the great controversy which has opposed earth to heaven is at an end: they are reconciled, free from condemnation, delivered from that cloud of wrath which overhangs the rest of the world; they are justified by faith, and therefore have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The consequence of peace with God is peace with one another; a spirit which unites men in a wonderful manner to their fellow-creatures, and especially to their fellow-christians. This, when it is diffused, will produce peace among all families and all

* Psalm xcvii. 11. † Ephes. v. 27. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

nations; it will be an antidote against all the animosities and discords that have prevailed in the world.

2. The dignity of the subjects of this kingdom is another privilege. Is it considered an honour for a king to have a large train of nobles, who can trace their origin through a long line of progenitors? Are these the strength of the throne? What a noble race are the subjects of Christ's kingdom! To "as many as receive him, he gives the power to become the sons of God."* This is the highest of all titles. Their earthly descent is not noticed; it doth not yet appear what they shall be:" but this is their nobility—"Now are ye the sons of God, and if sons, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." "What manner of love is this which the Father hath bestowed upon us!" All these sons shall be advanced to the kingdom; they shall every one of them be kings and priests unto God, and unite together in ascribing glory, and honour, and praise, and power, unto Him who redeemed them, and conferred this honour upon them. They shall have dominion over their sins, over the world, and over Satan, who shall be "bruised under their feet shortly." They will be invested with a holy office, reigning under Christ, and for his service and glory, for ever.

3. Immortality shall be the blessing of this kingdom: the subjects shall partake of endless life; a life that shall never be extinguished. In the Scriptures we read, "Whosoever believeth in Jesus shall never die. The fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and are dead; but he that eateth of the bread that I shall give him shall never die.†" He that keepeth the sayings of Christ "shall not taste of death." Death, in the scripture sense, includes that separation from God which begins in spiritual and is completed in eternal death;‡ this is that of which believers cannot taste. They receive in

* John i. 12. † John vi. 58.

‡ See pp. 99—102, of "Exegetical Essays on several Words relating to Future Punishment," by Professor Stuart, of Andover, United States; a work in which philological acumen and research are finely blended with sound discrimination and a genuine love of truth.—Ed.

them the embryo of eternal life: the spiritual life rises up into life eternal, and will be displayed in its perfection in the world of glory. As subjects of Christ's kingdom, his servants are immortal; whatever may affect their frail bodies, nothing can separate them from the love of Christ.

What an important blessing is the possession of eternal life and the resurrection of the dead! These terms include everlasting felicity in the presence of God; a privilege ineffable and invaluable, surpassing our apprehension, or any comparison that can be made. To enjoy the smallest portion of this blessing, is to be superior to all the greatness of the present state: the least in the kingdom of heaven is higher than the most exalted of the rulers and the philosophers of the world. We shall shortly see and feel this to be the true representation of the subject. Wicked men shall see it to be so, when, between them and the righteous, "there is a great gulf fixed;" good men will find it to be so, and their spirits will even fail within them, when they behold the order of the court of heaven, and the majesty of the kingdom.

These blessings which I have mentioned, will not only be put within the reach, but made to be the possession, of the subjects of the kingdom of heaven.

The benefits that result from well-regulated governments on earth are generally such as restrain from the pursuits of evil, prevent interference with others, remove obstructions, and leave open various avenues to the prosperity of individuals. Each subject must pursue his own course, and make his own fortune: but in this, the spiritual kingdom, positive blessings are conveyed. "The Lord will be to his people a place of broad rivers and streams."* "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, and hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."† He not only subdues our enemies, but delivers us from our trials; while he himself becomes a source of satisfying

* Isaiah xxxiii. 21. † 1 Pet. i. 3.

good. "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."* "I give unto them eternal life."†

I might mention some other properties of this kingdom, which, though they do not enter into the essence of it, are very important.

It is a growing kingdom. At first it was small, but it had in it an expansive power: it was "a little stone hewn out of a mountain without hands," but it shall become "a great mountain, and fill all the earth." It has grown, and is growing; "and of its increase there shall be no end."‡ "He must increase; he shall reign until all things are put under him." He goes on "conquering and to conquer:" the last enemy shall be overcome and be bound to the wheels of his chariot. The Scriptures are much occupied in these things. The prophets seemed to think as much of missions, their labours, and their successes, as we do, and often more intensely: they employed the most glowing language, and the sublimest strains, in their predictions of the glory of Messiah's kingdom in the latter day; they snatched from earth and heaven, from the sun, the moon, and the stars, the fairest and grandest images, to represent the state of the church at that desired period; levying a tribute upon universal nature, and making all things contribute to illustrate, as they will in reality contribute to advance, this kingdom.

This is a subject, then, my brethren, which can never be exhausted; you may speak of it through eternity! Open all your hearts, utter the most astonishing eloquence, call forth the host of angels to assist you in celestial songs, and still fresh views will burst upon your minds: you will appear for ever only to be at the beginning of the theme, only to be standing upon the borders of Immanuel's land; you will be called upon perpetually to rejoice, and again to rejoice, while you "speak of the glory of his kingdom, and talk of his power."

In connexion with those qualities which I have men-

* John xiv. 27. † John x. 28. ‡ Isaiah ix. 7.

tioned, the *perpetuity* of this kingdom must endear it, above all things, to a good man: this indeed crowns the whole. It is a perpetual kingdom; it shall never be removed; it shall never, *never* be taken away to be given to any other people; but the saints of the Most High shall continually possess it. It shall rise upon the ruins of all other dominions, and shall itself never be subverted.

Let us then rejoice at the tokens which we can trace of God's purpose to extend this kingdom. Our eyes have seen great and wonderful things: God is doing much for his church; we have advantages beyond any of our predecessors. Such a period as the present has not been witnessed since the days of the apostles: all events seem to be pointing to the final issue; and this should reconcile us to live in a time of desolation. In the midst of the darkness that surrounds us, a bright point is visible that forebodes the dawn of a brighter day. God is overturning, overturning; but it is to prepare the way for *his* coming "whose right it is, and who shall reign for ever."

The kingdoms of this world are changing and falling to ruin. Let us not be dismayed at this; they are made of changeable materials. We ought not to wonder if the mortal dies, and if the changeable changes; but ever to rejoice that we receive "a kingdom which cannot be moved."* Let us have grace, while we see these things, "to serve the Lord acceptably, with reverence and godly fear."

This kingdom, my brethren, will advance in the world when we have quitted it for ever. It is a kingdom, at present, consisting of two parts; there is an upper and a lower province: in the lower province the subjects are required to struggle and fight; when called hence, they shall triumph. Then shall we know what is meant by the glory of this kingdom, when "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes," and when "the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed us, and lead us to

* Heb. xii. 28.

living fountains of water;"* when we shall "rejoice before the throne, and reign for ever and ever."†

Let us, while we live here, sincerely pray and labour for the advancement and glorious increase of this kingdom, which embraces all the elements of purity and happiness. "This is all our salvation," and should be all our desire. Beyond this there is nothing to be hoped for; without this, there is nothing on earth that can render the prospect of death tolerable, or life worth possessing.

Finally, then, let us look to ourselves, that, while we hear these things, we may possess a personal interest in this glorious and happy kingdom. "The law and the prophets were until John;" but now is the kingdom of heaven; and let every man be pressing into it. Press into it—strive to enter. Strive as in an agony: "for many shall strive" imperfectly, "and shall not be able." Let it be your determination, by the aid of promised grace, to surmount every difficulty. Press into the kingdom: for behind thee is the wrath and curse of Almighty God; but within is a place of safety, of peace, and joy. Put your feet within the limits of this kingdom, and it will be as one of the cities of refuge to the men that were pursued by the avengers of blood; and the further you penetrate, the more will your peace and joy be promoted.

To be within this kingdom—how infinitely important! Why are there, then, any of you that are not earnestly seeking it? If you have not felt a concern about it before, what are your present thoughts? Is what we have advanced all imagination? Is it only a *fancied* empire that has been represented to you? Is there such a kingdom among men? Have you heard of it, have you seen it? And is the Saviour, the Lord of his church, wooing your souls? Is he asking leave to come in? Does he say, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in?"‡ Open then the door, and let the King of Glory come in.

* Rev. vii. 17. † Rev. vii. 9, 15. ‡ Rev. iii. 20.

If he visits you, it is that he may reign in you; and then he will bless you with his salvation. There is no one wise who does not yield to the Saviour; all are fools who are not either rejoicing in the evidence that they are in this kingdom, or earnestly desirous of it. Be not content that this kingdom should appear before you, and invite your attention for a time, and then vanish away for ever; say not, I shall see it, but not for myself. "Oh, thou that art exalted to heaven, take heed lest thou be thrust down to hell!" The kingdom of God indeed is come nigh unto you; it is nigh you in the gospel, it is nigh you in the efforts of the present time, it is nigh you in the exertions and the faithful endeavours of your ministers, it is nigh you in every sermon you hear, and in every ordinance you attend. It is nigh you; and you will never get quit of this thought: it will be as a sharp arrow that will drink up your spirits to all eternity. When this glorious kingdom is far from you, when between you and the blessed subjects of it "there is a great gulf fixed,"* you will for ever cry, Once it was nigh me; every sabbath it was nigh me; every day it was nigh me; for months and years together it was nigh me; but I refused it; I thrust it from me; I would have none of the Saviour's counsel, I rejected his reproof; and now—it is past; it is gone, it is infinitely distant from me; the things of the kingdom are for ever hidden from my eyes! Beware, lest that come upon you which is written; "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish."† "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."‡

* Luke xvi. 26. † Acts xiii. 40, 41. ‡ Psalm ii. 12.

VI.

GOD'S WAYS, THOUGH OFTEN INSCRUTABLE, ARE RIGHTEOUS AND JUST.*

[PREACHED AT LUTON, MAY, 1815.]

PSALM xcvii. 2.—*Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.*

THIS Psalm commences with a statement of the most important doctrine of religion; a doctrine which is the foundation of all serious piety;—that of the rule and dominion of God over his creatures. It then calls to rejoicing in that great truth. In every time of trouble this is the Christian's consolation; and it is his chief joy in his best moments. He who is "above all," continually conducts the machine of providence, and superintends all things in every part of the universe. This is the unfailing source of comfort to a good man,—"The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice."

In the text we have a concession made, perfectly consistent with the great truth before propounded: "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgement are the habitation of his throne." Two propositions are contained in this text, to which I now propose calling your attention.

I. "Clouds and darkness are round about God."

II. "Righteousness and judgement are the habitation of his throne."

I. "Clouds and darkness are round about God." The figurative language in the poetical parts of the Old Testament is frequently taken from the historical books, and refers to the facts therein recorded: thus the appearances of God to the saints and patriarchs in old times, are the origin of the figure in our text. If you look at the history of these appearances, you will find they were all accompanied with clouds and darkness. The cloud of the Lord went before the children of Israel when they departed from the land of bondage. This

* Printed from the notes of the Rev. Samuel Hillyard.

cloud had a dark and a bright side, and was a symbol of the divine presence: thus it preceded the people in all their marches, as a pillar of fire by night, and of a cloud by day.* When Solomon dedicated the temple, the glory of the Lord filled the house, and the priest could not enter into the house of the Lord, "because the glory of the Lord filled the house."† When God descended upon Mount Sinai, "there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud. And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, upon the top of the mount."‡ When our Saviour was transfigured before three of his disciples, "a bright cloud overshadowed them," from which proceeded the voice of the Father, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."§ And Peter, who was present there, afterwards referring to this fact, says, that the voice proceeded "from the excellent glory."‖ Thus, in all the symbols of the divine presence, there was a mixture of splendour with darkness and obscurity. So it is in the operations of providence: in a moral and figurative sense we may say, that clouds and darkness surround all the operations of divine power and wisdom.

Clouds are emblems of obscurity; darkness of distress. The works of God's providence are often obscure and productive of distress to mankind, though "righteousness and judgement are the habitation of his throne."

In the present state of the affairs of the nations we see the interference of Divine Providence; and yet it is surrounded with clouds and darkness. Never was the hand of God more conspicuous, yet never were men less able to penetrate and comprehend his deep and unfathomable designs.

As this is the divine method of government with

* Exod. xiv. 19, 20. † 1 Kings viii. 10, 11.
‡ Exod. xix. 16, 18, 20. § Matt. xvii. 5. ‖ 2 Pet. i. 17.

respect to affairs of a larger scale, so it is also in instances of a smaller and inferior kind; it is thus in the removal of the most eminent, holy, and useful characters, that while we acknowledge the hand of God, we say, "clouds and darkness are round about him." Such removals we have recently experienced: "The fathers, where are they; and the prophets do they live for ever?" No. Such as seemed most necessary in the church, the pillars of the temple, are removed, and many are trembling for the ark of God. We are taught to "be still, and know that he is God," since "what we know not now we shall know hereafter:" and we feel it necessary, in our obscurity and distress, to refer to the great principles of his government, "Judgement and righteousness are the habitation of his throne."

The course of events has not been such as might have been expected from the known character of God. If we look into the book of history we shall perceive that there is much disorder in earthly scenes, much confusion in the affairs of men; and was this to be expected from a God of order and wisdom? We know that he is a Being of infinite mercy, that out of his infinite fulness he loves to communicate happiness to his creatures; yet we see them oppressed with calamity, surrounded by miseries; and we find that man has, in all ages and in all stations, been "born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward."

Again, we know that God, in his great love to our world, has devised a plan to raise men to happiness and glory; his regard to this plan, and the objects of it, appear in all the doctrines of revelation, in all the miracles by which they are supported, and in all the prophecies and glorious things that are spoken concerning the church, by which our expectations have been so greatly raised. But how have these expectations fallen short of their accomplishment; what a small part of the world is enlightened by the beams of the "Sun of Righteousness;" how narrow are the limits of the gospel; how little has been done by christianity, compared with what might have been anticipated from the divine principles,

the character of the Author, and from the interest it possesses in the heart of God. We have, as yet, wrought almost no deliverance in the earth; Paganism yet strikes deep its roots in various lands; Mahometanism has plucked up the "good seed of the kingdom" in countries where that seed brought forth fruit abundantly; even in what is called Christendom, how little have the known and blessed effects of the gospel been manifested. Jesus Christ came to reconcile all who receive him into one family; to make, of many, one body; to compose discords, to allay violent passions and animosities, to make wars to cease, and to give peace, and love, and harmony, to his followers; but those called christians have been inflamed and armed against each other. From the beginning, dangerous errors have produced noxious effects; the "mystery of iniquity" began to work; those who "named the name of Christ" have inflicted greater barbarities upon one another, under the influence of superstition and bigotry, than their fathers had suffered from their pagan persecutors. The woman that "sat upon the scarlet-coloured beast" is indeed "full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns;" she is still arrayed in "purple and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abomination and filthiness, and fornication; and upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the earth. And I saw," says the apostle, "the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus; and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration."* And what could be less expected, what more surprising, than that christianity should occasion the discovery of so much vileness? Nay, where genuine christianity is taught, how small, how slow, has been its progress; how few seem to be converted to God, compared with those who are enemies in heart to him, and to the kingdom to which they profess to belong! Instead of christians

* Rev. xvii. 4—6.

being of one heart and of one mind, they are armed with malice and envy against each other on account of some differences of sentiment and judgement; even persons of real piety give way to prejudice and party zeal, which prevent, in a great measure, the operation and effect of pure christianity. Thus this blessed system of religion seems to have been the occasion of more feuds and strifes among its professors than any other interest has produced since the world began. Look at the state of the world; see nations professing the name of Christ, rushing into hostilities, building all their hopes of future peace upon the success of their plans of bloodshed and carnage, breathing defiance and slaughter in their words, and displaying them in their enraged countenances. When will the end of these things be? Were it not for the sure word of prophecy, we might be ready to imagine "God had made all men in vain." A great part of the world is no better than if Christ had never come to save mankind, and the gospel had never been proclaimed. Some who hear it are even the worse for what they hear; for where it is not "a savour of life unto life," it is "a savour of death unto death."

I might expatiate still more on this portion of the text; but sufficient has been said to prove that things have not been according to expectations founded on the known character of God, but that "clouds and darkness are round about him."

We proceed, then, to the second class of remarks, suggested by the passage before us.

II. "Judgement and righteousness are the habitation of his throne."

Righteousness is the essential perfection of the Divine Being. It is his nature; if there had been no creatures for him to govern, he would have had an unchangeable and invincible love of rectitude.

Judgement is the application of the principle of righteousness in his government of his creatures and their actions; it is a developement of his rectitude in the management of the affairs of his great empire; it is that superintendence over all, whereby the operations of all

things are directed to some vast and important end. Judgement implies measure and equity in opposition to what is done without rule and consideration. All the divine conduct is equitable, regulated by the utmost rectitude; every thing is directed by a judgement that cannot err.

Thus "Righteousness and judgement are the habitation of his throne." The throne of God is built, and stands firm, upon these principles; they are the place, the basis, and the foundation of his throne. Though the clouds cannot be dispelled, though there is thick darkness round about, through which our eyes cannot penetrate; yet there are principles discernible through the light of revelation, and by the eye of faith, which may serve to subdue despondency, and lead us to acquiesce in all the measures of the righteous Sovereign. Though much obscurity must necessarily envelope the government of an Infinite Mind, and great perplexities may be felt by those who attempt to scan his measures; yet some considerations may be suggested, which will serve to quell our anxieties and afford us repose under all the darkness, beneath his protecting power, his all-directing wisdom, and his paternal goodness.

1. Let us ever remember that the dispensations of God towards man are regulated by the consideration of his being a fallen and disordered creature. If we do not admit, or if we forget this, we are in great danger of falling into universal scepticism, and shall not be able to conclude, that "verily there is a God, that judgeth in the earth." If man is now in the state in which he was originally created, all is obscurity and gross darkness; but if we understand that man is a creature who, by his own fault, has lost that favour with God which he once enjoyed, and yet is placed under a dispensation of mercy; frowned upon, but not given up to destruction; open to receive the grace of God under the gospel, and by the mediation of Jesus Christ; then some light will shoot through the darkness, by which we may see the "righteousness and judgement" which "are the habitation of his throne."

The fallen state of man must be kept in view to account for the severities in the divine dealings with him. His banishment from paradise; the curse of the ground by which it brings forth thorns and briers, and the sweat of the brow by which he eats his bread; the labour and sorrow of the woman in child-bearing; and, finally, the sentence of death which is passed upon man, and keeps him always in bondage; and the present state of society, the fraud, rapine, cruelty, lust, and contention, are all accounted for, by simply reverting to the fall of man, from the image and favour of God. Yet, notwithstanding the severities of God, let it not be forgotten that there are mixtures of mercy which we have reason to admire. They that have forfeited all right to happiness, must not complain if any drops of it are found in their cup. They that have lost the inheritance, must not complain if any of its fruits are afforded to them. They that deserve to be "banished into outer darkness," must not complain if "clouds and darkness are round about Him" whom they have offended. "Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?"*

They that deny the depravity of human nature are involved in perplexity, and speak on the subject of divine government with such doubt, confusion, and embarrassment, as increase scepticism in themselves, while they too often produce it in their admirers.

The doctrine of the fall of man must be considered as a fact, to a knowledge of which the Scriptures conducts us: it relates the circumstances of the original transgression; expressly asserts that "God made man upright but he hath sought out many inventions;"† and that "by one man, judgement passed upon all men to condemnation."‡

2. The Divine Being was not bound in justice, either to prevent the disordered state of man, or to correct it when it had taken place.

All moral government has its foundation in the suitability of its laws and motives to regulate and influence a

* Lam. iii. 39. † Eccles. vii. 29. ‡ Rom. v. 18.

creature endued with reason, understanding, and volition. All that is necessary in the government of such a creature as man, is that the law should be equitable, and that man should be originally possessed of faculties which rendered him capable of obedience. Were we to go further, and suppose that the Governor was obliged to see his law fulfilled, this would make him accountable to his own law, while the accountability of the creature would be destroyed. If the creature, besides having a righteous law and powers capable of obedience, must also be kept from the possibility of disobeying, the rule would return back, and become binding upon him that gave, rather than upon him that received it. Though I feel incompetent to go far into this subject, yet, from what we know of the nature of God and of man, it may be safely affirmed that it cannot be required of the Divine Governor to secure the obedience of his creatures any further than the law, as a motive, is calculated to have an effect upon rational minds. On what ground, then, can it be imagined that the world has a right to require God to prevent, or to remedy, moral evil?

3. The whole of those evils that form clouds and darkness round about God, are either the penal or natural effects of moral evil. The terrors of conscience, the fears of death, restlessness and dissatisfaction of mind; these and numerous other evils, are partly the natural, and partly the penal consequence of sin; and show that man is not in the state in which he was originally created, but is reduced by his disobedience to a state in which all things are "vanity and vexation of spirit."

With respect to evils of a physical nature, most of them are evident consequences of the state of man as a sinner. What is war, strife, contention, but the effect of evil passions; the natural fruits of apostasy? These are the actions and workings of the evil mind,—malice, envy, pride, and covetousness. The sentiment of love, which unites to God, being broken, what effects can be produced but dissension and disorder—domestic, national, and universal! There is, indeed, less disorder and confusion than might have been expected from the universality of

the apostasy; the wisdom and goodness of God, having checked a great proportion of the evil that would have proceeded from the corrupt fountain of our depravity. We can never sufficiently admire the wisdom and goodness of God for such institutions as preserve a tolerable degree of order in this fallen world. Many benefits result from those checks and restraints which are imposed upon men, even when the heart is not renewed.

But still further. God has established another kingdom in the midst of the kingdoms of the world. He has created a new race among the race of men; the men who are the "salt of the earth," and the "light of the world." They prevent that universal corruption which would work its ruin, and that darkness which would tend to utter destruction. Yet there is much darkness and corruption remaining: and if you ask how long it will continue, the prophet answers, "Until the Spirit be poured on us from on high;"* that is, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only thing which can correct the evils that prevail among mankind. This grace is not conferred by the Divine Being in the character of a governor, but as the fruit of his favour; it is, however, the only cure; and hence the most intense desires should possess our minds for the promotion of the gospel,—not only that God may be glorified "in the highest," but that on earth there may be "peace and good-will among men."

4. Those that receive the grace of Jesus Christ are still in such a situation as renders a great part of their trials and miseries necessary. Many of the evils of a depraved nature still remain, and need to be subdued and removed. Pride must be abased; "covetousness, which is idolatry," abhorred; impurities cleansed; and malevolent passions conquered. This is a state of probation; and it is repugnant to reason to talk of a state of probation in which nothing is met with that is dark and painful. Besides, the virtues and excellencies of the christian must be perfected in the same way in

* Isaiah xxxii. 15.

which the Captain of our Salvation was perfected: he must be conformed to Christ, and have fellowship with him in his sufferings. Jesus Christ is set forth as a type of all the happiness that accrues from suffering, from struggling, and from conquering; and we must resemble him in this respect. To this purpose our present state is adapted; every thing is so contrived as to afford opportunities of conquest. The pleasures of the world, the crosses of life, the remains of concupiscence, the venom of the "old serpent," and the insults, if not persecutions, of the wicked, are enemies by which we are beset; and we recover from their assaults, and overcome, by the exercise of prayer, vigilance, and persevering struggles. "There is no discharge in this warfare," —we must conquer or die. God will confer no distinction (I will not say, but where it is deserved) but only where it may be given as a recompense for service. The design of Christ is to raise his people to glory, to communicate to them the fulness of God; but as he obtained these blessings by his death, as he purchased them by his blood, so in the same path he leads on his people to his glory. Thus he makes all our afflictions and enemies preparatives to our victory and triumph. The Divine Being will display his infinite wisdom in leading his people through the wilderness: and they shall walk "in white," with "palms in their hands," and crowns on their heads, who "come up out of great tribulation."*

5. The moral evils of man, and the depravity of human nature, are often, in a great measure, corrected and subdued by the natural evils of life, and thus are made the means of conducting to repentance, reformation, and happiness. The Spirit is not generally given to lead the soul to God and the enjoyment of a life of faith, without being preceded by affliction and troubles. He leads into the wilderness, and then speaks kindly unto man; he destroys our idols, hedges up our way, surrounds us with difficulties, and then pleads with us. Thus he deals

* Rev. vii. 9, 14.

with individuals, and thus also with nations at large. "When his judgements are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants thereof learn righteousness." The overflowing of a corrupt opulence, the abundance of prosperity, nourishes, as in a hotbed, all the bad passions of the heart. But the sword, pestilence, poverty, pain, and innumerable other evils, excite us to deep and serious reflection, and thus prepare us, by the influence of the gospel, and the operation of grace, to return to God. A sense of a superior hand is felt; the vanity of the world is discovered; the soul looks out for something on which to rest, and is prepared to hear the voice which says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved." I doubt not but the cloud now gathering, and the judgements now about to descend, will be the means of casting down high thoughts, and "humbling the lofty looks of man, that the Lord alone may be exalted," and that the world may be filled with his glory. One temple of the Holy Ghost is of more esteem in his sight than all the splendour of palaces, than all the riches of the world. Jesus Christ is overthrowing all the grandeur of man, that he may gather out of ruinous heaps, and from a perishing world, the materials of an imperishable temple. He is taking out of every nation a people whom he will form for his praise. In his providence he is subverting, scattering, destroying, in order that he may find stones to polish for a temple into which he will enter, into which his Father will enter, and where they will abide. This is the one great end the King of Righteousness has in view. The preparatory scenes of the world are as a "valley full of bones, very many and very dry;"* but the Spirit of the Lord shall raise out of them a people upon whom he will breathe, and they shall live and become a glorious army, animated by the heavenly grace. How is it possible, if we see things only with carnal eyes, that we should see them as God sees them, who directs all things with a view to an eternal state of being? Our "light affliction" may work for us a "far more exceeding and

* Ezek. xxxvii. 1—14.

eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal."* It is only by looking at "things unseen and eternal," that we can derive true benefit from the miseries of life. Under the hand of God every thing is propelled, every thing temporal is rushing forward to give way to, or to be united with, that which is eternal. This is the developement of the whole plan, the explication of all the complicated movements of providence. Look at the things which are eternal: there is the state to which we are tending, where we shall know in perfection what we now know only in part, and shall be satisfied that all has been conducted agreeably to the known character of God.

6. Yet, let it be observed, that even here the light of prophecy dispels many of those clouds which would otherwise obscure, for the present, the government and the throne of the Deity. We are assured, that in the latter day the gospel will be more widely disseminated, that its influence will be more extensive and efficacious, that the superstitious prejudices and vices, by which it has been so long opposed will give way; that the desert and the wilderness shall become a fruitful field, and "shall blossom as the rose;"† that all the kingdoms of the earth shall bring their riches and glory into the church, the whole earth shall be full of the glory of the Lord, and there shall be peace unto the ends of the earth. At what period this glory of the latter day will commence, is not for us to determine; it is generally agreed the time draws near: how long it will last is, again, not easy to tell. The thousand years are perhaps to be calculated upon the same scale as other prophecies, wherein a day stands for a year, which would make them more than three hundred and sixty thousand years. Be this as it may, at that period the Spirit will be poured down from on high; the potsherds of the earth that have been striving, will be dashed to pieces: the great Proprietor will

* 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. † Isaiah xxxv. 1.

come to fashion them anew: then "the fruitful field will be as a forest," and the forest "as the garden of God;"* none shall destroy in all God's holy mountain; the sacred influence of piety will bring us back to a paradisaical state; the love, the harmony, the plenty which will abound, will fill every heart with gladness; the temple of God shall be among men, the marriage of the Lamb will come; and the universal song will be, "Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!!"†

If this period shall continue long, the miseries that once reigned will be forgotten, and all the disorder that was introduced by the fall will be as nothing, when compared with the joy of the restoration; the creation of a "new heaven and a new earth, wherein righteousness shall reign."

"Behold, the coming of the Lord draweth nigh; but who can abide the day of his coming?" He will come with his "fan in his hand." "He will sit like a refiner of silver." The chaff will be separated from the wheat; the visitations of the Almighty will find out his enemies; the phials of his indignation will be poured out upon the opposers of the gospel; wrath will come upon them in this world, preparatory to that of the eternal state. Let us then, my brethren, "flee from the wrath to come." Let us consider the salvation of the soul to be the one thing needful. The body is only the tenement in which the soul is lodged, the case in which it is enclosed; the soul is all important; its value infinite; "the redemption of it is precious;" "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"‡

The gospel is the only refuge to which we can flee. It presents Christ crucified among you, shedding his blood as an atonement for your sin, willing to "save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." O my friends, accept his grace; break off from every sin; ask yourselves in what you have offended; set your sins in order before you; remembering that if you do not, Christ

* Isaiah xxxii. 15; li. 3. † Rev. xix. 6. ‡ Mark viii. 36, 37.

will do it at the great day. Judge yourselves now, that you may not hereafter be judged and sent to condemnation. Turn with humble penitence to the cross of Christ, and approach God by him; bend your knee before the throne of grace, plead the merits of the Redeemer's blood, and be "reconciled by his death."

May God grant you these blessings for the sake of his Son. Amen.

VII.

ON THE DISCOURAGEMENTS OF PIOUS MEN.*

[PREACHED AT BEDFORD, MAY, 1815.]

NUMBERS xxi. 4.—*And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.*

It is generally understood and believed that the Old Testament is in great part typical. The history of the deliverance of Israel is a type of redemption by Jesus Christ; the paschal Lamb a type of the great Passover. The journey of the people through the wilderness represented our pilgrimage through this world; and the land of Canaan was a shadow of the heavenly rest. Viewed in this light, many parts afford direction and consolation peculiarly suited to individual experience.

I shall take leave to accommodate this passage as an expression of what frequently befalls the people of God in this world; "their souls are greatly discouraged, because of the way."

The present life is a way; it is not the end of our being: it is not our rest, it is not our abode; but the place of our pilgrimage, a passage to eternity.

There are two ways; the way to heaven, marked out by the example of Christ, and the way to perdition, marked out by an evil world. But there are many discouragements that the christian meets with, though he

* Printed from the Notes of the Rev. Samuel Hillyard.

is in the way to heaven. These we shall point out in the first place, and then direct you to some considerations to remove these discouragements.

I. I shall point out the discouragements in the way; and, in doing this, I shall keep my eye on the pilgrimage of the people who were originally referred to in the text, and thence draw my chief illustrations.

1. The way is circuitous, and therefore discouraging. This is suggested in the beginning of this verse: "And they journeyed from Mount Hor, by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom;" they took a way which was round about, and thus added to the tediousness of their journey. Their nearest route would have made it comparatively easy; but, instead of taking that, they went up and down in the wilderness. When we consider what God had done for this people in Egypt, it might have been expected that all the way would have been prosperous; that joy would have been heard in their tents, and triumph attended their march; and it would have been seen that they were the people of God by the blessings which they enjoyed: but, instead of this, they met with delays, hinderances, and troubles, till they murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, "Why were we brought out hither? Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt."* Thus, souls that are brought to Jesus, and delivered from the slavery of sin and the curse of the law, in their first ardour overlook trials, and think of nothing but enjoyments; they do not anticipate the fightings and fears that are the portion of God's Israel. After a time, through want of watchfulness and care, the love of their espousals begins to decline, the world regains a degree of influence, the Spirit is grieved, and they fear God has become their enemy; they seem to themselves to go backward, and, indeed, are in danger of doing so, if they neglect to watch and pray; and much time is spent in mourning, retracing and recovering the ground that has been lost. This is too common a course: there is

* Exod. xvi. 3.

provision made for something better; there are promises and comforts which should encourage us to advance "from strength to strength;" but, through our neglects, we feel that we go backward instead of forward, and are therefore discouraged.

2. The way is through a wilderness, and is, on that account, discouraging. Moses reminded Israel of this, in Deuteronomy: "You remember how you went through the wilderness, a waste land, not sown or tilled, where there was no trace of human footsteps, and where no man dwelled." A wilderness is distinguished by the absence of necessary sustenance: there was no corn, nor vine, nor olive; nothing to sustain life. Thus, this world is a state of great privations; men are often literally straitened with poverty, penury, and sorrow, and know not how to conduct themselves in their difficulties, or how to surmount them: the supplies which they once had may be exhausted; and, though they have seen the hand of God, in affording them what was necessary on former occasions, they are ready to ask, Though the rock has supplied us, and the manna has descended, yet "can God spread a table for us in the wilderness?" With respect to the blessings of this life, they live by faith, and frequently have no provision or prospect of futurity.

But, in a spiritual sense, this world is also a wilderness. It has no natural tendency to nourish the spiritual life; nothing is derived from it of that kind: though spiritual blessings are enjoyed in it, the christian knows they are not the produce of the soil; the "bread" which he eats "cometh down from heaven;" the perpetual exhibition and communication of that one bread is all his support. Jesus Christ says, "I am the Bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead; but he that eateth of this bread shall never die. My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."* The ordinances of the gospel do not support and comfort us any farther than there is a heavenly communication and influence attending them. This is not peculiar to

* John vi. 48—50, 55.

the poor: the rich, who abound in worldly things, feel that this is a wilderness to their souls; they feel that there is something to which earthly treasures are not suited; wants which they cannot supply. The same bread that feeds the poor must feed them, or they will be lean from day to day: on this they depend as much as the meanest around them. David felt this when he said, "I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land."* "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. When shall I come and appear before God?"† "Deliver me from the men of this world, who have their portion in this life." "Then shall I be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness."‡ There was nothing on earth to satisfy him; he felt the present world to be a wilderness, because it was a state of absence from the divine presence. The "child of God" is a child of promise and of hope, and his eye is directed to the "glory that shall be revealed."

Again: there is much intricacy in the christian's pilgrimage. There were no paths in the wilderness; the Israelites could not have explored their way but by the direction of the pillar of fire and of the cloud: so the Christian often knows not how to explore his path. There are doctrinal difficulties by which we are perplexed, and errors to which we are continually exposed, and which we know not how to escape but by attention to "the light that shineth in a dark place." There are voices that are heard in the wilderness, crying, "Lo here," and "Lo there;" but we must not go after them: we must "search the Scriptures,"§ and ask the guidance of the Spirit, or we shall never have the comfort that arises from right views of truth, nor hear the "voice behind us saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." I need not enumerate the various errors of the present day; but simply specify the two chief, which are, such a view of the doctrines of grace as destroys the necessity of

* Psalm cxliii. 6. † Psalm xlii. 1, 2.
‡ Psalm xvii. 15. § John v. 39.

holiness; and such a view of the Saviour as destroys the notion of grace. There are also many difficulties in practical religion; and thus we are again in danger of mistake. What shall we do to serve and please God? The general rules of scripture are sufficient, if studied with a humble mind, for general direction; but they do not furnish us with immediate and particular directions in all cases: diligent inquiry is necessary, attending to the voice of conscience, giving up sensual desires and inclinations, and rejecting temptations presented in various forms. There is only one grand remedy, if we would walk aright: "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."*

3. The way lies through a hostile country, and is, therefore, discouraging. We pass through an enemy's land. The Israelites went up in military array, marching in file; and they had not proceeded far before the kings of Edom and Moab, and the Ammonite, opposed them. They were obliged to unite the courage of the military with the assiduity of the pilgrim's life; they had to fight as well as travel. And so must we: during our pilgrimage we must gird on "the whole armour of God, taking the sword of the Spirit, and the shield of faith;"† we must conquer as well as advance; we must fight our way, or die. There are three great enemies—the flesh, the world, and the devil: these are allied, have perfect understanding with each other against us, and combine their efforts for our destruction. The christian pilgrim becomes a marked character in the world; he dwells alone; the men around him take the alarm; they endeavour to imbitter his choice and retard his progress. Satan is also alarmed, and he is never found to give up a subject without opposition.

A man going on in a carnal course will scarcely believe in Satan's temptations; he regards it as mere enthusiasm to think or speak of them; he has not felt them, and will not think they can be felt: but the

* James i. 5. † Ephes. vi. 13—17.

christian soon learns that he has to fight against "principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickedness." He finds his enemy assault him in various ways, and knows that he "must be resisted that he may flee from us;"* for "he goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."† The flesh is also an enemy. The christian experiences the workings of carnality, a hankering after that which is evil, and to which he may have been addicted; as the Israelites after "the onions and garlic of Egypt." There is a tendency towards earth, as well as towards heaven; a principle that depresses and bends him downwards, as well as one that elevates and prompts him to soar above: he is forced to complain of "cleaving to the dust," and cannot always say, "My soul followeth hard after God." "There is a law in the members warring against the law of his mind."‡ He complains of "an evil heart of unbelief." There is in him an army with two banners; "the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh:"§ this renders it necessary that our life should be a continual struggle. These conflicts belong to every condition. Those that have most of the world are often most exposed, and are seldom less exempt than others from assaults; and no wonder that hereby christians are often discouraged, especially when they feel they do not always succeed. Even when they are not vanquished, they sometimes lose ground; and when they have overcome, they are afraid of fresh conflicts, in which their strength may fail, and their enemies gain the advantage.

4. The false steps that are taken in the pilgrimage, and the consequent displeasure of God, are discouraging: there are so many errors and iniquities for which the Lord chastens his people, though he pardons sin as to its eternal consequences. How often did the children of Israel offend God and awaken his anger? and where is the son whom the Lord does not see fit to chasten? These chastenings of the Lord often drink up or oppress

* James iv. 7. † 1 Pet. v. 8.
‡ Rom. vii. 23. § Gal. v. 17.

the spirit, and overwhelm the soul. "All thy waves and billows are gone over me."* They think of God, and are afraid. They cry, "Oh, be not a terror unto me,"† lest I suffer thy frown and be distracted. The bitter herbs are unpalatable; the fears of hell seize hold of them as terribly as when they were first awakened to a sense of sin and danger; they feel their frailty and tendency to depart from God; and they apprehend future trials, and know not how long the painful dispensation will continue. "Is his mercy clean gone for ever; doth his promise fail for evermore?"‡

5. The total defection of men from the path is a great discouragement to those who still continue in the way. I do not think that all who died in the wilderness were cut off as rebels; indeed it could not be, for Moses and Aaron were of the number: yet they were set forth as types to warn us of the danger of not entering into rest. Here was a shadow of the greater loss of them that "turn back to perdition." How many can we recollect of those who were once active and zealous in the cause of God, that have gone away and walked no more with Christ, of whom we may say, "It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they had known it,"§ "to turn again to the beggarly elements of this world!"||

Providence sets a mark upon such persons: their idols are snatched from them, and they become as pillars of salt to remind us of the danger of looking behind us. What deep searchings of heart are hereby occasioned! "I also shall fall by the hand of" the enemy; I have in me a similar nature with his, and may be exposed to similar temptations. "Lord, hold me up," or I shall not be safe. Nothing weakens the confidence of the christian army more than the failure of those who appeared brave in the day of battle, and conspicuous in the ranks. When ministers and eminent professors fall away, our hands hang down; we suspect others; we are jealous of

* Psalm xlii. 7. † Jer. xvii. 17. ‡ Psalm lxxvii. 8.
§ 2 Pet. ii. 21. || Gal. iv. 9.

ourselves. "Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* "Every one must give an account of himself to God,"† and "let every one have rejoicing in himself, and not in another,"‡

6. The *length* of the way is discouraging. The time occupied by the Israelites from their entering to their leaving the wilderness, was forty years. Thus long were Caleb and Joshua in travelling through it! This was a tedious journey; such a one as was never performed before: a type of the journeys of the church militant. The whole of human life, with all its toils and cares, is comprehended in this journey; there is no rest, no cessation of the pilgrim state, till life is finished. "Be thou faithful unto death," or all thy former toil is lost and will be of no avail. Now, though human life is short in itself, yet to our limited conception it appears long; especially when passed in suffering and pain, "when the clouds return after the rain," and there is none to tell us "how long." In protracted afflictions is seen the patience of the saints. It is more easy to endure the greatest shocks of trouble, than to endure those pains which are more moderate, for a long season. Patience is worn away by continued afflictions, rather than overwhelmed by the rolling wave. Those saints, who endure in private, though unnoticed by their neighbours, and perhaps unknown, are the bravest heroes of the christian camp. We must, my brethren, hold out unto the end. We must touch the goal, or we run in vain: our last effort must be made in this journey, or we shall never reach the Canaan that lieth beyond the waters of the grave.

Thus I have given you a serious representation of difficulties and trials; and it may appear discouraging to many: the people of God may be much discouraged at times, when they know not how long they shall thus have to walk and be weary. But there is another view of our pilgrimage: it is not wise to hide our eyes from trials; let us, therefore consider them well; yet let us,

* Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24 † Rom. xiv. 12. ‡ Gal. vi. 4.

at the same time, inquire whether among these scenes there are not interspersed motives to support, encourage, and animate our minds.

II. I shall now, therefore, endeavour to direct you to some considerations to remove your discouragements.

I. Remember, the way you are in, believer, is "a right way," notwithstanding all that has been said. Infinite Wisdom has ordained it: and if you reach the end, you will be well repaid for all your toil, and will admire the whole of the pilgrimage: no sorrow will appear to have been too heavy; no path too gloomy. There was no bitter ingredient in your cup that could have been spared; no affliction but what operated to promote the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." You will look back and acknowledge that Infinite Wisdom directed the darkest path, and caused it to terminate in joy and glory unutterable. This is the way in which many have been conducted that are now in glory; they are gone up out of "great tribulation." There is a "great cloud of witnesses," who "through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises:" let us also, with patience, "run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame."* Take the prophets and ancient saints as examples of suffering: think how they were tried. Remember the prison of Joseph, the reproach of Moses, the dungeon of Jeremiah, and the death of Isaiah. "Remember the patience of Job" under all his afflictions. God has heated the furnace for some of the most eminent saints seven times more than common, because they were endued with a divine power of suffering with patience, and were favoured with the presence of the Son of God. The people of God have been chosen in the furnace of affliction; "the bush has been on fire, but not consumed," for God was in the midst to preserve it; and he not only preserves his saints, but gradually conforms them to his Son Jesus, who himself suffered: for this purpose he came

* Heb. xii. 1, 2.

into the world and united himself to human nature; wherefore arm yourselves with the same mind. Our sufferings are necessary, to wean us from the world and to deliver us from sin: "he that hath suffered is free from sin."* We must either suffer by self-denial, or be chastised of the Lord. "If any will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me:"† let him behold both the cross and the crown, and never turn aside from that path which leads to the crown, whatever cross he may have to bear. A man of this world, who is governed by sensual inclinations, and seeks after vain pleasures, is "dead while he lives."‡ This was not the course of our Master; and, be it remembered, it is he who says, "Let him follow *me*."

2. Another encouragement is, that God is with his people in the way. He was with Israel to guide and defend them. They had visible tokens of his presence, and saw that he stretched out his arm for their protection, and the overthrow of their adversaries. Thus also, when Jesus sent forth his disciples, he said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."§ If he lays upon our shoulders the heavy cross, he supplies unction for the bruises it occasions. If he leads into the wilderness, he "speaks comfortably;" he spreads a table there, "and his banner over us is love." "Greater is he that is with you than all that are against you." God is in the world as the great upholder, governor, and benefactor; but he is in the church by his special grace, as a vital principle, an ever-living friend to sustain, animate, and influence. With him we have communion, and from him communications of mercy. We are one with him; all our need shall be supplied: "as our days, so shall our strength be."|| We may know not how to meet an expected trial; but grace shall come, and be all-sufficient for us. Only keep your face Zion-ward, and "though the young men faint, and are weary" in waiting upon the Lord, you shall "renew your strength, mount up on wings as eagles, run and not be weary,

* 1 Pet. iv. 1. † Matt. xvi. 24. ‡ 1 Tim. v. 6
§ Matt. xxviii. 20. || Deut. xxxiii. 25.

walk and not faint."* "His strength shall be made perfect in your weakness." "When I am weak, then am I strong;"† most gladly, therefore, will I "glory in infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." "In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him who loved us."‡ Only look not behind you, think not of turning back, and he "will never leave you nor forsake you."

3. To overcome the discouragements of the way, remember there is no other way that leads to heaven. You cannot reconcile the service of sin and the world with the hope of heaven and the enjoyment of everlasting life in that holy state, and in the presence of the holy God. Will you, then, forego the hope of Canaan; as you must when you yield to sin, when you give yourselves to the world? There is no other way to heaven than the way to which the Scriptures of truth direct you. You must "crucify the flesh;" you must "purify yourselves" by faith through the Spirit; you must be conformed to the Saviour; you must take up the trials of life with patience, or look for the punishment of death. The choice of Moses was truly wise; it was the only choice wisdom *could* make. Happy are they who choose like him; Canaan shall be for ever theirs. The Land of Promise was but a type, a shadow, of their inheritance; it was a perishable inheritance; it was but a mere span, a moment of happiness and glory, compared with that which shall be revealed, of which, at present, we can only say we know but in part: for "it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* A few moments there will banish all earthly trials from your mind; or you shall remember them only to enhance your bliss. The enemy, like the Egyptians in the Red Sea, shall be seen no more. The trials of the saints shall be left far behind, and sin shall never vex them again. How will this happiness repay all their toil!

* Isaiah xl. 31.
† 2 Cor. xii. 10.
‡ Rom. viii. 37
§ 1 John iii. 2.

how sweet will be the remembrance of the bitterest herbs! how unspeakable and inconceivable the joy, when they shall be with angels, and justified spirits, and Christ and God, in the kingdom of glory! We are lost in the contemplation of this sublime subject; yet we know that future happiness is greater "than eye hath seen or ear hath heard." How should it transport us to think that we may be counted worthy of this high calling; that God hath revealed to us this glory! It is only by Jesus Christ and his gospel that "life and immortality are brought to light." It is by God's becoming man that man may become like God, a partaker of the divine nature. Let us not, my brethren, deem ourselves unworthy; let us not sit down content with inferior things, like Esau, who, for "one mess of pottage, sold his birthright." It is infinitely better to suffer in this life, than to lie down in death. Go forward, then, christian; go forward: "forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before."

I pray God that these plain truths may be blessed to your souls; that you may be stirred up to diligent perseverance in the ways of God; that you may be a comfort to the minister whom God hath placed over you; and that he may "present you with joy at the coming of Jesus Christ." And, if any of you have not yet entered on this way, to such we would affectionately say "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Come, ye careless ones, "ye simple ones, turn in hither." You think not of death, but of the gaieties of life; you walk after the desire of your hearts and the delight of your eyes; but there is no happiness in your path; if you proceed, you *must* perish; for it leadeth to destruction. All your pleasure is but for a moment; there is more true pleasure in the roughest path of the christian than in the smoothest road you can find: you will never have peace, consolation, or rest, till you come to the Saviour. Come, and he will do you good: you shall have all the innocent enjoyments of life that will be for your real comfort; all your trials shall be ordered by wisdom and love; you

shall have the best support in the day of adversity, and in the life to come, everlasting glory. "All things shall be yours;" Christ your Saviour, and God, the Creator of the universe, your God and Father.

We do not know what you may meet with by the way, nor what you shall enjoy in the end; but what we enjoy you shall enjoy. God will remember you with the favour that he beareth to his own people, and visit you with his salvation." O, that every one might come! None would be turned away without the blessing: there is room enough; "there is bread enough and to spare." We invite, nay entreat you, to leave those muddy streams, which must be given back in tears of repentance. Come and taste of the "water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."* Come and partake of these blessings. Every moment, while you delay, your danger increases: and if you utterly refuse, you perish! "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."†

VIII.

THE VANITY OF MAN APART FROM HIS IMMORTALITY.*

[PREACHED AT BROADMEAD, BRISTCL, AUGUST, 1815.

PSALM lxxxix. 47.—*Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?*

THE Psalm in which these words occur is supposed to have been written on occasion of the calamities which befell the kingdom of Israel in the reign of Rehoboam; and the Psalmist appears to have been lamenting those distressing events by which the glory of David's family

* Rev. xxii. i. † Rev. xxii. 17.

‡ Printed from the notes of the Rev. Thomas Grinfield, A.M. of Clifton.

seemed to be extinguished. In the bitterness of his feelings, he is carried out, from the particular occasion which excited them, to a general contemplation of the vanity of human existence. From these words I propose to show, that,—considered merely in his present state, apart from any reference to eternity and the prospect disclosed by revelation,—man (it may be truly said) is "made in vain."

1. The first thing that strikes us, in such a survey of our being, as circumscribed within the term of mortality, is *the shortness of its duration.* "Remember how short my time is." This circumstance, which cannot have escaped, or failed to affect, any reflecting person, is frequently adverted to by the sacred writers. "My days," says Job, "are swifter than a post; they are passed away as a shadow." "Behold," says the Psalmist, "thou hast made my days as a handbreadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee: as for man, his days are as grass; in the morning it is green; in the evening it is cut down and withered." The transient nature of his existence stamps an inexpressible meanness on man, if we confine our view to the present life; and forces us to confess that, laying aside the hope of immortality, "every man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity."

2. The same reflection must have occurred to most persons of a thoughtful character, when they have contemplated *the general state of that world* in which we are placed; the mischief and misery that pervade it; the disorder and desolation which the unruly passions of men perpetually introduce; the wantonness with which they rush to deeds of violence and injustice; the almost incessant national contentions, in which the destruction of one part of the human race seems to become the business and sport of the other. Whether the balance of good or of evil preponderate on the whole, is a question we may here leave undecided. In some more favoured conditions of society, it is probable there may be a predominance of good; in others, less favoured, of evil: but, that such a question should exist at all, is itself a sufficient proof how much evil exists in this world.

Viewed, therefore, merely as they are here, and excluding the supposition of a future state, all men will appear to be "made in vain."

3. Again, when we recollect how many thousands of our species are born the *subjects of some inherent, incurable disease or imperfection of body*, such as may be said to render their life a protracted malady;—when we call to mind how many are constitutionally the victims of dejected spirits and a morbid melancholy, such as cast a gloom over every surrounding object, and dim their perceptions to the fairest scenes of life and nature; (a case which is exemplified in the great and amiable Cowper;) we are compelled to acknowledge, of the multitude so circumstanced, that—if we consider them merely as existing in that hypothetical state which terminates with death—they also are "made in vain."

4. And farther, when we take into the account those millions of mankind who are condemned, through the whole of life, to *manual and mechanical labours;* whose day after day is consumed in a constant round of the same unvaried employment,—the twisting of a thread,—the continuing the friction of a wheel,—the exercise of the file, the saw, or the hammer, and similar operations, which have so little concern with mind, so little tendency to engage the intellectual powers by which man is distinguished from the surrounding creatures, that they are as well, if not better, performed by various machines of modern inventions;—who, that limits his view of man to this sublunary scene, can forbear to sympathise with the desponding Psalmist in the text? In labours like these he observes millions of those beings are employed, who are created with a mind capable of looking backward and forward with endless activity of thought,—capable of comprehending truth and advancing in knowledge,—capable of enjoying a happiness commensurate with its own vast desires. The inheritors of such faculties are employed in labours like these; in the performance of which, after the practice of a few years, they attain such a facility and perfection, that no room is left for improvement; and for the rest of life nothing

remains but the repetition of the self-same labours;—labours in which the mind is altogether passive and dormant, nor is any exercise afforded to the reason or the affections. Not that I would be understood to censure the mechanism of civilized society, which evidently requires this arrangement in a greater or less degree; but, walk the streets of a commercial or manufacturing city; observe the multiplicity of handicraft occupations which meet your eye at every point; and, without blaming the existing organization of society, I ask whether,—if cares like these are to engage the chief part of human attention, (cares rendered, perhaps, necessary by the imperfection of our present circumstances, but immensely disproportioned to the capacity of our nature,) —if men are condemned to terminate their existence in these pursuits, and are not reserved for another and higher state of being, I ask whether the great majority of mankind are not "made in vain?"

5. But there are those, it may be said, who do not fall under this melancholy representation;—men of wealth, minions of fortune, who bask in her smiles and revel in her favours; whose circumstances seem to be formed by their will, and who appropriate whatever they desire. Surely, you will say, such "men of this world, *have* their portion in *this* life;" surely an existence like theirs, even if we suppose it confined to earth, apart from any ulterior consideration, has a sufficient end in itself; and, though their existence is short, they are exempt from the charge of having been "made in vain." Now there is a delusion in this view: and if we examine the advantages which men of wealth possess over others, we shall find that nearly all the pleasures peculiar to superfluous opulence are reducible to two classes; the class of *sensual gratifications*, and that of *ambitious distinctions*.

(1.) And first, with regard to the *gratifications of sense* which the rich have at their command; how little *these* can be said to redeem their possessors from the lot of a vain existence,—how little *these* conduce to supply that happiness which is the end and perfection of our being,—will appear by the following considerations.

The pleasures of sense, in the first place, can never be proposed as an adequate end of our creation; because, in pursuing them, we always regard them as subordinate to something of superior importance, our regard to which is allowed to be the just rule of sensual indulgence. The inferiority of these pleasures to something beyond and above themselves is never doubted; a wise man advises a proper abstinence from such pleasures for the sake of *health;* a good man, for the sake of *virtue;* either of which is justly regarded as an object superior to that which it ought to regulate. But the true end of existence must be something final, something beyond which nothing can be proposed as of superior magnitude: and unless there be alleged some worthier object of our creation than one which is thus referred to another which has a right to supersede it, it cannot be disproved that "men are made in vain."

Besides which, let it be recollected, in the next place, that the pleasures of sense, pursued beyond a certain limit, so far from tending to create happiness, tend to destroy it, by the very construction of those organs which are the instruments of sensual enjoyment. That craving after happiness which every bosom feels, and the satisfaction of which involves the perfection of our existence, cannot be supposed to attain its proper object in any of those animal pleasures, of which the pursuit (unless kept in continual check) leads to the extinction of happiness and existence itself. The proper object of this grand desire of our nature must be something, in the pursuit of which we may safely let loose the utmost energy and ardour of the soul; something essentially, entirely, and eternally good, in the pursuit of which we need not fear lest we should injure ourselves, but may reckon upon benefit and success proportioned to our zeal and diligence —the pursuit of such an object constituting, in effect, the proper business of our being.

And, in the third and last place, the enjoyment of the senses cannot present to *human* beings the appropriate and distinguishing end of their existence, because they are only enjoyed by man in common with the lower

animals. *That*, whatever it be, which forms the true end of *human* existence, must be something which is adapted to the great peculiarities of our nature as *rational* and *moral* beings: but sensual fruition is received in an equal, perhaps a greater degree, by the brutes. To what purpose this comprehensiveness of reason, this prodigality of powers, this grasp of memory, this vigour of imagination, this restless activity of hope and desire, if the inheritor of such high endowments were doomed to seek the perfection of his existence in the command of sensual gratifications? Few, in fact, are so infatuated as to believe that such gratifications are the end of their creation. Notwithstanding the ardour with which the pleasures of sense are pursued by many, still they are always regarded (at least where society is not unusually depraved) as matter of shame and concealment to their votaries; all thinking persons are anxious to redeem their character from the degrading imputation of devoted sensuality, by intermingling other and worthier pursuits with pleasures of this description; and he who should abandon himself, in the gratification of animal propensities, to the neglect of every higher aim, would be universally allowed to have lived "in vain."

(2.) But there is another class of pleasures, as was observed, with the command of which wealth supplies us; the *pleasures of ambition*,—the respect and homage which are paid to high station and splendid circumstance. Now, on an examination of these pleasures, it will be found that they are unreal and imaginary,—that they consist of nothing more than a fiction of the imagination, a false elation of the mind, by which we may be said to *identify* ourselves, or to be identified by others, with all those varied instruments of pleasure which affluence commands; by which we *diffuse* ourselves (as it were) over the whole sphere in which we preside. Of those who place their happiness in pleasures of this class it may be most emphatically said, that "they walk in a *vain show*:" and could we assign no better end of our being than that which thus places it in a mere *delusion*,—a false *semblance*

of enjoyment,—we should be reduced to confess that "all men are made in vain."

Thus it appears that neither the pleasures of sense nor those of ambition, (to the one or the other of which classes all the pleasures of wealth are reducible,) afford any adequate account of our existence as confined to the present scene; and that *men of wealth* are not, more than others, exempt from the mournful charge of the Psalmist.

6. To proceed. Neither can we exempt from the same condition *men of knowledge*, who pass life in the cultivation of intellect and the pursuit of truth;—an object, it must be allowed, better suited to the nature, and better proportioned to the dignity of man as a rational being, than those before mentioned;—an object which too many it is to be feared, have in every age regarded as the very highest which they could propose to themselves, as characteristic of a state beyond which they could aspire to none more exalted, and in which, if they could but escape from all intrusions of passion and accident, they would be completely happy, they would desire no higher order of existence.

That the favourite pleasures of such men,—the pleasures of knowledge and intellect,—are noble in their nature, exquisite in their degree, and permanent in their continuance, will not be denied by those who have sufficiently experienced, and who are competent to estimate them. But, in the first place, to how *few* are these pleasures confined! What a mere scantling of the race is qualified to enjoy them in any considerable degree? Not one person in a thousand has either the abilities or the opportunities requisite to their high enjoyment; while to the rest, to the great bulk of mankind, they are the hidden treasures of a sealed book. And can *that* be supposed the final object of our being, which can be enjoyed but by a small proportion of those who inherit that being! Is it to be conceived that, while the million are "made in vain," only here and there a chosen individual is permitted to attain a destiny worthy of his nature? The truth is, of the few who make knowledge

the aim of their engagements, none can secure himself from the intrusion of disturbing passions or distressing accidents. It is only in the smooth expanse of the lake, when there is no wind to agitate its bosom, that the forms of surrounding nature are reflected clear and unbroken: and thus it is only where the mind is in a state of undisturbed tranquillity, that the pleasures of science and literature can be pursued with success. But the lights of philosophy are liable to be broken by the waves of adversity, and darkened by the clouds of grief; the man of study is obnoxious to the same external privations,—of health, friends, or fortune,—with other men: the invasions of calamity, to which all are exposed, will find him out in the most sequestered retreat; and, after all, he will be feelingly convinced that, if knowledge be the end of our being, and that being terminates on earth, —he, like all other men, has been "made in vain."

Besides which, we have it on the testimony of one of the greatest proficients in knowledge that ever appeared among men, that "increase of knowledge," far from being increase of happiness, "is increase of sorrow." And though this proposition may require to be received with some limitations, certain it is that the mere *knowledge* of things, the mere *perception* of truth, is something extremely different, something entirely separable, from the *enjoyment* of things, the *possession of real happiness*. There is not, between the two, the slightest necessary connexion: there may exist, in the same character, the scantiest portion of the one in union with the largest measure of the other. We by no means find that, the more things we know, the more we enjoy our existence; and the simple reason is, that knowledge has its abode in the *understanding*, while happiness is seated not in the understanding, but in the *heart;* so that the condition of the rudest peasant may be an object of envy to the most enlightened philosopher. In a word,—happiness is a state which we are *all* equally concerned to attain; but wealth and knowledge are conditions accessible only to a *few*. Happiness has its seat in the *heart;* but wealth and knowledge are not adapted to satisfy our

affections: therefore wealth or knowledge cannot be supposed to constitute that proper happiness of man, without which he is "made in vain."

7. Once more. There yet remains another and a yet more elevated order of men, who place the grand object of their being in *religion;* who think of God, trust in God, and, on all occasions, devote themselves to do the will of God: men who, receiving the Scriptures as His own divine revelation, conceive that they are pardoned and accepted by their heavenly Father, through the mediation of the Son of his love; conceive that they are renewed and influenced by the power of his Spirit; and, regarding the "things which are seen and temporal" as preparatory to those which are "unseen and eternal," "set their affections on things above, not on things of the earth;" consider themselves as "dead to the world, and their life as hid with Christ in God; and trust that when He who is their life shall appear, they also shall appear with Him in glory." What shall we say of such persons? We say that, if this were the only state of being ordained for man, *they*, like others, would be "made in vain:" we say, with the desponding Psalmist, "Verily, they have cleansed their hearts in vain, and in vain washed their hands in innocence:" we affirm, with the apostle Paul himself, "If in *this* life only they have hope, they are of all men *most* miserable," *most* worthy to be commiserated. For, according to this supposition, they are the *only* persons who are utterly disappointed of their object; the only persons who, (by a fatal and irreparable mistake,) expecting an imaginary happiness in an imaginary world, lose their only opportunity of enjoying those present pleasures of which others avail themselves; dooming themselves to grasp at shadows, while they neglect the substance; harassed with a perpetual struggle against their natural propensities and passions; incurring, perhaps, the enmity or ridicule of their fellow-mortals; and—if the supposition be true that there is no such future state as that which they anticipate—all this is in vain!

But that supposition is *not*, for a moment, to be be-

lieved: these men are not thus deluded; they are *not* to be thus disappointed; it is impossible to conceive that they are. The perplexity, the inconsistency, the palpable absurdity, into which *those* are driven who argue upon the non-existence of immortality, the falsehood of revelation, proves, as far as proof can be expected, that *theirs* is a false hypothesis! Upon *their* hypothesis, man is the greatest enigma in the universe; that universe is itself a problem not to be solved: all is mystery, confusion, and despair! Bring in the light of revelation and immortality, the clouds and thick darkness in which the scene was enveloped disperse, and all is clear and harmonious. Man, with his astonishing endowments, is no longer "made in vain;" the universe, with its amazing phenomena, is no longer "made in vain!" We learn at once the cause and the cure of that vanity, in subjection to which "the whole creation groans," together with man. The origin of our misery and death, the recovery of life and immortality, are alike brought to light. Man has fallen by sin from the favour of his Maker; hence all the disorders and evils that surround him: but a salvation has been provided; "God hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath committed to us the ministry of reconciliation; God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, *not imputing to them their trespasses!*" *This*, my dear brethren, is the testimony of God in his own word; and, though men may dispute its authority, "let *God*," we say, "be true, but every man a liar."

To attain a share in this salvation, to recover the true end and perfection of our existence, in the resemblance and the favour of "the *only happy God;*" this is the great object of desire and pursuit to those whose eyes are opened to their real situation, whose hearts are awakened to a sense of their real want. And, "remembering how short their time is," they are the more in earnest that, by a glorious reverse of their naturally ruined state, they may prove at last to have *not* been "made in vain." They "pass the time of their sojourning in fear;" they are "sober, and watch unto prayer,"

"As obedient children, they fashion not themselves after the lusts of their ignorance, but, as He who hath called them is holy, so they seek to be holy in all their conversation." In a word, they count all things as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour: for they "*know* whom they have believed;" they have the *fullest assurance* in their faith. On other objects, which are so eagerly pursued by the men of this world, they have closed their eyes for ever: "forgetting the things behind, reaching forward to those before, they *press* forward to the mark" and prize of their high calling; and, though racks, ropes, swords, or fires were to obstruct the way, they would *rush* through them all to reach their eternal goal! Jesus Christ is to them the very food of the soul, the very bread of life; and they make it the substance of their continual supplication, "Whatever beside is denied, *Lord, evermore give us this bread!*" Such are the views and affections which inspire true believers; such the object which, stretching into eternity, puts out, casts a darkness over, the brightest sublunary splendours; an object, apart from which it may be justly said, that "men," that "*all men are made in vain!*"

The necessity and certainty of that salvation, that immortality, which the gospel reveals, is *one* and the *first* inference from what has been said: *another*, and the *last* inference I shall mention, is the extreme folly and misery of those who persist in the neglect of this salvation, this immortality. It is to throw away the end of existence, to sever ourselves from the possibility and the infinitude of happiness, and, in the awful language of scripture, to "*judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life!*" If a vast sum of money were committed to us, and we suddenly discovered that, by our own neglect, the whole was lost, we should be affected, probably, with serious alarm and regret: but what must be our emotion,—what our consternation, remorse, and despair,—should we discover, at the last judgement, that we have lived *in vain;* that, so far as our own interest is concerned, we have been made *in vain;* that we have received the grace of God

in vain; that, having neglected the one salvation, we are *lost*, lost in the scale of being; immortal creatures, *lost* to the great purpose for which our Maker gave us existence; *lost* to happiness; irrecoverably and for ever *lost!* What must it be to discover that the mistake we have committed is at once *infinite* and *irreparable;* that we have been guilty of an infatuation, which it will require *eternity to deplore, and eternity to comprehend!* Now is the accepted time: let us earnestly avoid such an unutterable calamity; let us choose the favour of God as the only adequate end of our being; and embrace the salvation of Jesus Christ as the only way to attain that end; in a word, let us act as those who are swayed by the conviction that the *christian* is the only man of whom it can be said, in relation to eternal felicity, that he is *not* "made in vain."

IX.

DEATH, THE LAST ENEMY, SHALL BE DESTROYED.*

[PREACHED AT BEDFORD, MAY, 1817.]

1 Cor. xvi. 26.—*The last enemy that shall be destroyed, is death.*

In this chapter the apostle directs the views of christians to the final consummation of all things; when the mediatorial kingdom of Christ, in our nature, having answered the ends for which it was established, shall be surrendered, "and God shall be all in all."

This kingdom is, in the mean time, progressive, and will be so till all enemies shall be subdued and placed under his feet. The apostle brings in the words of the text as an instance of this general proposition. But it may not be improper to remark that there is an inaccu-

* From the Notes of the Rev. S. Hillyard

racy in our common version, which so vitiates its application, that it does not seem to sustain the conclusion to which the apostle had arrived. It was his purpose to establish the perfection of our Saviour's conquest, the advancement of his triumphs, and the prostration of all enemies whatever beneath his power. Now to say that "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death," by no means affords a proof of this position. Though death might be destroyed, and be the last enemy that should be destroyed, it would not thence appear but that other enemies might remain, not destroyed. But the proper rendering is, "Death, the last enemy, shall be destroyed."

Having made this observation, I will now direct your attention to the import of the proposition; and will consider—

I. The nature of the great enemy that shall be destroyed; and why he is called "the last enemy."

II. The manner and the successive stages in which our Lord Jesus has already conquered in part, and will completely conquer, this last enemy.

I. The nature of that enemy that shall be destroyed, and why he is called "the *last* enemy."

It is not necessary to say much to show that death is, in *many* respects, an enemy to the sons of Adam. It is so, first, if we consider it in its most obvious effects, the dissolution of the human frame. Every part of the body is part of a marvellous fabric, of a wonderful machine; which bears upon it the mark of divine wisdom and skill in its contrivance and execution. It is a work which man is not only unable to form or contrive, but the contrivance of which he is not able to comprehend. Every man possesses and carries in himself certain excellencies of composition, and enjoys the benefit of innumerable operations, while he is wholly unacquainted with the internal machinery by which they are produced. If we look upon the Goths and Vandals as the enemies of the nations, and of all civilized society, because they destroyed palaces and temples, and the ancient monuments of art; what must we think of death,

which demolishes, not only in one victim, but in innumerable victims, the noblest fabric that was ever raised on earth; and spoils the most skilful works that were ever constructed? All human beauty, and vigour, and strength, are at once laid prostrate by the power of death; are broken and shivered to pieces under the stroke of this great tyrant. Were we to see, at one glance, all the victims which, in different lands and climes, and in all ages, have fallen before him, we should behold a pile of ruins raised to the heavens; but these ruins are mostly crumbled to dust, and concealed in the darkness of the grave; or what an amazing view would be afforded of the power and conquests of this universal enemy!

Again, Death is an enemy, as he puts an end to all that is terrestrial and temporary with regard to man. All the schemes, and projects, and thoughts, that relate only to the concerns of time, are destroyed. "In that very day," says the word of God, "his thoughts perish:" all the thoughts of the sublimest genius, of the most acute philosophers, of the subtlest statesmen, of the most ambitious projectors, perish! All find, at once a termination to their intellectual labours, their sublunary joys and sorrows, hopes and fears; they go only as far as death leaves space for them; and stop where he opposes his power. As much, therefore, as the world is worth,—as much as it possesses of value in the eyes of man,—so much is death to be considered as a formidable foe, standing forth against him, and in opposition to his career.

Say, ye ambitious, ye lovers of wealth, ye pursuers of earthly pleasure, what will all the objects you desire avail you when you are summoned to meet this last enemy, and are by him confined to the narrow limits of the grave? What will you do in that period when your "souls shall be required of you," and you are questioned, "Whose shall these things be?" As much as you value these, so much death will be your enemy.

Death is also an enemy, because of the dissolution of the tenderest ties of nature and affection; of all those

endearments of friendship that bind man to man. Death tears asunder brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, parents and children; he snatches the tender infant from the mother's breast, or bereaves it of parental care, and leaves it a helpless orphan in this wilderness. One part of the mortal compound is left by him to mourn and sigh, while the other part is mingled with corruption, and becomes a companion of worms. Death so mars the features, that the most passionate admirers of the fairest and most lovely forms of beauty, are constrained to say, as Abraham said of Sarah, "Bury my dead out of my sight." All the fruits of friendship are withered by his breath; and one has been called alone, to go through the dark passage where no one could accompany him: while the survivor, who is left behind, frequently experiences the greatest sufferings, from the emotions and reflections of his mind. Alas! how many fond mothers, beloved children, and valuable friends, have been already sacrificed to this inexorable tyrant! Nor is there any union so closely formed, nor any friendship so established and strengthened, but it will be cut asunder and destroyed by the stroke of this great enemy, death.

But the most terrible yet remains;—the moral, or rather the eternal consequences of death. If divine grace had not interposed, death has a sting by which he would pierce every transgressor, and send him to a state of interminable misery. "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law."* The death of the body is by no means the full infliction of the penalty of the divine law. What we look upon as death, is only a dark passage which conducts the sinner to the state of eternal death. The dissolution of our body, and the separation of the spirit from it, is but a preparation; like knocking off the chains and fetters from a prisoner who is about to be led forth to the place of execution. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life."† Eternal life is here contrasted with death: but

* 1 Cor. xv 56. † Rom. vi. 23.

what is the opposite of eternal life, but eternal death—the death of the soul, which consists of the perpetual loss of hope; a cutting off from the presence and favour of God; a sense of his eternal wrath, which burns like devouring fire? The second death treads in the footsteps of the first, and its shadow covers it; it is the infliction of the sentence of the Eternal Governor of the universe; and the fear of it makes those who are aware they are sinners, willing to struggle with a load of cares and sorrows, rather than fall into the hand of the living God; for it is a fearful thing,—"a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

There are many properties of this enemy which give him the pre-eminence of terror. He is an inexorable enemy. Others may be bribed by riches, soothed by flatteries, moved by the tears and sorrows of a suppliant, or reconciled by a mediator; a daysman may interpose; one may come between us and our enemy, who may interpose to ward off or suspend the blow; but none can "give a ransom for his brother," to redeem his soul from death:† "there is no discharge in that war:"‡ the redemption of the soul ceaseth "for ever;" there is no price that can be offered, or would be accepted. All the riches of the universe would be despised, if they were offered for only an hour's deliverance from the power of death: he wants the man himself, not what he possesses. Death will tear away the most ambitious from the heights of his power, the wealthy from the midst of all his stores, and the voluptuous from the scene of all his pleasures. His ear is insensible to the groans of the child, and his eye is unmoved by the tears of the mother; he is not to be arrested or turned aside by the wailings of innocence, or by the outcries of guilt. All are levelled by the same undistinguishing stroke, and there is no possibility of release.

Death is an impartial enemy. Other enemies have particular grounds of quarrel; they do not oppose the *whole* of the species, but some individual, or a number

* Heb. x. 31. † Psalm xlix. 7. ‡ Eccles. viii. 8.

of persons from whom they have received, or suppose they have received, an injury: but every one of the human race is the object of his enmity; his arrows will level all in the dust: "for it is appointed for *all* men once to die;"* and the grave is the "house of *all* the living." The strongest know that all their strength must fail: amidst all their dissipation, their hurry and care, their jollity and mirth, they know that in the path along which they hasten on there is one that will meet and destroy them; and they begin to look forward with anxiety and dismay in proportion as they approach the seat of this terrible majesty.

Like other great monarchs, he also has harbingers to proclaim and prepare for his approach. He sends before him the most agonizing pains and afflictions; diseases that consume our strength and vigour, and sometimes induce us to expect his arrival every moment. By the trembling joints, the dimness of the eyes, the changed countenance, the breaking of the "bowl at the cistern," and the loosing of the "silver cord," we know that he is near at hand. There is a shadow of death cast before him, extending according to the height of this terrible majesty, and stretching over part of the vale of life: yes, all that precedes our dissolution, all that is preparatory to the last stroke, are harbingers of death; afflictive in themselves, and to be dreaded on their own account, but peculiarly fearful as the precursors of this great adversary.

As these are his forerunners, so he has innumerable and dreadful instruments for destruction. The famine and the pestilence are in his hand; he kindles the fury of the battle, and riots in the field of slaughter; he wings the forked lightning, and expands the jaws of the devouring earthquake. The air we breathe, the elements by which we are supplied, and the food upon which we subsist, are often converted into the instruments of death: he levies a contribution upon all; and extracts the poison of mortality from that which is given for the sustenance of life.

* Heb. ix. 27.

Death is called, not only an enemy, but the "last enemy." This is introduced principally to denote the completeness of the Redeemer's conquest: nothing remains after the last.

This is the last enemy of the church of God in its collective capacity. Persecution shall cease, affliction be removed, fears and terrors of conscience quelled, temptations overcome, and Satan subdued: still the triumphs of death will remain; a large portion of what the Lord has redeemed will remain under his dominion; the bodies of believers will continue in the grave till the final consummation of all things. Though Jesus Christ extends his sceptre over all nations, and all kingdoms become the kingdoms of God and his Christ,—though millions of the faithful shall reign with him, and rejoice over every other enemy, and hope to rejoice over this,—yet the vestiges of his conquests shall remain legible in the graves of the saints, and on the tombs and monuments of the just.

Death is also the last enemy of every believer. The christian obtains a hope of pardon; he goes on conquering one temptation after another, "from strength to strength," from victory to victory; but he knows that, after all, his body must come under the power of this enemy, and remain for a season in his dark domain. 'I have,' says he 'been carried through many trials; I have surmounted many difficulties; I have triumphed over many powerful temptations; but the dying part still remains: I have still a scene to pass through, in which I must be left alone; no friendly hand to guide or support me. I must engage, singly, with an enemy, whom all men dread, and whose power no *man* comprehends, for it is invisible. He smites with an unseen hand: and, though millions have passed through the conflict, not one has returned to tell the secrets of his power, and to unveil his territory; which, after so many ages, remains, as to us, "a land of darkness, as darkness itself."' Though the christian does not sink into despair as he meets the last enemy and the hour of contest approaches, yet he frequently trembles; for he knows not

what may occur before that triumph is afforded which puts the seal of perpetuity to all the other triumphs of his soul.

To other men, what ought I to say of the last enemy? However long they have escaped his power, he will meet them at last; when they are giddy with intoxicating pleasures; or walking on the heights of boundless ambition; or are the slaves of an avarice, rapacious as the grave: when they imagine they have nothing to fear, when "they have more than heart can wish, and their eyes stand out with fatness," they find an enemy coming upon them "like an armed man;" they find in death all that is terrible; they are forced to encounter the *last* enemy—an enemy that must be conquered, or they must be defeated and lost for ever and ever.

II. We are to consider the manner, and the successive stages, in which our Lord Jesus has already conquered in part, and will completely conquer, this last enemy. "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet."* Death, the last enemy, shall be destroyed.

Consider the degrees and stages by which Jesus Christ conquers death.

1. By his incarnation and passion he purchased a right, in behalf of the human race, to conquer death and to triumph over it. Power and right are two distinct things; and, among men, the former is frequently opposed to the latter. A man may have power to do what he has no right to do. Jesus Christ, as God, had power to put down death; but it was necessary, in order that it might be put down fitly and properly, that such an expiation should be made as would remove the guilt on account of which mankind were doomed to die. "It became him,"—there was a fitness, a congruity in the measure,—"it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."† Not perfect with respect to his moral character, but perfectly fitted for his work; sustaining, by

* 1 Cor. xv. 25.

† Heb. ii. 10.

his sufferings, the penalty his people had incurred, and thus acquiring an indisputable right to conduct them through every scene of life and death to his kingdom and glory. Remember, the moral consequence of sin is death. It was impossible that this enemy should be put down unless some way could be found to expiate our offences, that the transgressors might be freed from the penalty which, being transferred, was sustained by a surety. It was Jesus Christ, who, in consequence of uniting in his person the nature of God and man, interposed between man and God, "to make an end of sins, and to bring in everlasting righteousness."* This he accomplished by his incarnation and suffering. His incarnation rendered him capable of suffering, and his divinity stamped an infinite value upon the sufferings of his humanity. Thus the weakness of his flesh united with the dignity of his Godhead to procure the ransom of mankind from their subjection to death. His Father "laid help upon him as one that is mighty," "he exalted one chosen out of the people:"† "this is his servant whom he upholds, his elect in whom his soul delighteth."‡

This enemy, according to the established and eternal rules of the divine government, could not be encountered and overcome but by one who was willing to yield, for a season, to his power. He that would conquer death for us, must invade his territories, pass the threshold of his cavern, become an inhabitant or a sojourner in his domains: and to this Jesus submitted. By death, "he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage."§ Thus, by weakness, he became "mighty to save." His sufferings and death upon the cross laid those deep and immoveable foundations on which the fabric of immortality is firmly built.

2. Jesus Christ, by his Spirit, gives the earnest and the pledge of victory over the last enemy: he takes away

* Dan. ix. 24.
† Psalm lxxxix. 19.
‡ Isaiah xlii. 1.
§ Heb. ii. 14, 15.

the power of sin, which is the sting of death, and he communicates the principle of life. Whoever is enabled, through the Spirit, to lay hold of Jesus Christ by faith, lays hold of him who is the "resurrection and the life." "Whosoever believeth in me shall never die."* Thus our Saviour taught, to the confusion of the Jews: "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."† Thus they shall never taste of death; that bitter taste, which lies in the dread of its consequences, they shall not experience, as those do who know not Christ and have not his Spirit. They who flee into the arms of the Saviour, who appropriate, by faith, the fruits of his death, become, thereby, living members of their living head; they have the "earnest of the purchased inheritance;" they enjoy peace with God, a holy superiority over their "last enemy;" and, as they advance to the contest, can triumphantly exclaim, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"‡ They know him to be a destroyer only of that which must be destroyed; and that even the body, though it moulder to dust, shall rise again. Their souls are also inlaid with blessed principles, so as to be prepared for a glorious immortality. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you;"§ and

* John xi. 25, 26. † John vi. 54—58.
‡ 1 Cor. xv. 55. § Rom. viii. 9—11.

by these influences they shall become meet subjects of eternal purity and happiness.

Thus Jesus Christ shall go on reigning till every portion of the power of death is abolished. The penalty of death is conditionally abolished in favour of the whole, so that it is proclaimed throughout the world, that "whosoever believeth on the Son of God shall never perish, but have everlasting life."* And there is an earnest of immortality in the believer: as Jesus Christ, our substitute, took possession of immortality, and "became the first-fruits of them that slept,"† so all his saints have in themselves an inward pledge, like that which Christ had on earth, an earnest of their alliance to eternal life.

3. When these preparatory measures have taken place, the empire of death shall be sapped to the foundation, and its power be utterly destroyed. It has, indeed, been a widely extended empire, founded on, or spreading over, the ruins of all other empires: it has comprehended within its domains all the seed of Adam; it has continued from age to age. Compared with the length of its existence, the boasted eternal duration of the Roman city and empire is as nothing. But the final stroke will produce the entire overthrow of this wide and lasting dominion. The chapter from which the text is taken treats of this. He who first, by his death, gave us a right to this victory, He who, by giving the earnest of the Spirit, raised us to a holy superiority over our enemy, will at last vanquish him by that almighty energy by which he is "able even to subdue all things unto himself."‡ He will then "fashion these vile bodies like unto his own glorious body;" he will stand forth as the pattern by which believers shall be formed. They that are earthy continue, like the first man, earthy; but believers, who once bore the image of the earthy, shall then bear the complete image of the heavenly. "The first man is of the earth," but "the second man is the Lord from heaven."§ He has the capacity of everlasting ex-

* John iii. 16.
† 1 Cor. xv. 20.
‡ Phil. iii. 21.
§ 1 Cor. xv. 47.

istence; a well-spring of life from which life will be supplied to all his brethren. In the epistle to the Thessalonians, which is the first that was written by this apostle, he says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you, by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first."* He does not mean to teach us here that they shall rise before the wicked, however true that may be; but that they shall rise before those who are alive shall be changed: "then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."† The first effect of divine power will be to raise the dead in a moment, to call forth those that sleep in the dust, to make "the sea give up the dead that are in it;" to loosen the tombs and open the sepulchres that have been closed for ages over the dust of the saints: *then* "they which are alive shall be changed." He recurs to the same subject in the chapter whence the text is taken: "Behold," says he, "I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."‡ The last trump, which shall give notice of the change of those that are alive, is here distinguished from the former trumpet, at the sounding of which the dead shall be raised. Thus the Saviour, by one voice, uttered with greater majesty than when he said, "Lazarus, come forth," will raise the dead, and by a second he will

* 1 Thess. iv 13—16. † 1 Thess. iv. 17.
‡ 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

change the living; so that all will be prepared to be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air."

Thus the empire of death, which has suffered a slow decay, which it has required so many ages to overthrow, which has often seemed to recover from its defeats, will at last sink by one powerful stroke, never to rise again. It will not require more than a moment of time to raise all the dead, to lay open every supulchre, to restore every particle of dust that is fit to be restored, to its proper body, and for all the bodies of the saints to be prepared for the mansions of eternal glory. How insipid and tame are the histories of all other conquest,—of the rise and fall of all other kingdoms and empires,—when compared with the grand and wonderful achievements of the "King Immortal," and the fall of death beneath his power, and the giving up of all his prey;—when every victim from earth and sea, though under monuments of marble, nay, rocks of adamant, shall be restored;—when he shall bring forth every particular form to be repossessed by its proper spirit, from which it has been for a season divorced! He will "swallow up death in victory," and then clothe his redeemed with garments of immortality. Death shall be known and feared no more. Millions of millions shall join in everlasting praises to him whom all the redeemed will then acknowledge as their great Deliverer.

My dear brethren, what is the proper improvement of this subject? To raise our eyes in adoration and gratitude to the blessed Saviour, who will fulfil the threatening, "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."* "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." "We shall be more than conquerors, through him that loved us."† Lift up your eyes, ye saints, in love and praise to the glorious Redeemer. He hath reconciled you by his blood; defeated your spiritual enemies, and excited in you the liveliest hopes of immortality. What remains for you is infinitely greater than what you possess. "Be-

* Hosea xiii. 14. † Rom. viii. 37.

loved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."* What is the proper frame of spirit for you to cherish? To have your conversation in heaven, to be "looking for, and hasting to, the coming of the Son of God."

How great, my brethren, are the privileges you enjoy! Have you any need to struggle and scramble for the perishing riches of this world? Will you "load yourselves with thick clay?" Will you murmur and repine if you are disappointed in your expectation of worldly good, or if you are deprived of what you once enjoyed? Will you forget "the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation." The pledge is granted to you now. Your Elder Brother, at the right hand of the throne, has taken possession for you. Will you suffer yourselves to be corrupted by the "lusts of the flesh, and of the eye, and the pride of life," while you have heaven open to you view, and the promise of eternal life laid before you? It doth not indeed "appear," at present "what you shall be;" there is not scope on earth for the display of such glory; the glory of the eternal world must come down, before we can fully know what "God hath prepared for them that love him." Your glory would be too great to be sustained by flesh and blood; these cannot enter into the kingdom but at the redemption of the body. Then shall be the "manifestation of the sons of God;" the meanest christian will appear as a glorious temple of the Holy Ghost; every saint will arise and shine as the sun in the kingdom of his heavenly Father. At his powerful voice, that penetrates the grave and agitates the dust, all shall shine forth with a lustre which will extinguish all sublunary glory.

How, also, ought these considerations to elevate believers above the sorrows and afflictions of time! The

* 1 John iii. 2.

apostle, when speaking of the same solemn event, in the passage from the Thessalonians which I have already quoted, adds, "Wherefore, comfort one another with these words." This indeed is substantial comfort; this is the balm of every wound: this supports us under the stroke that bereaves us of our dearest friends and relatives. Those who have followed the remains of christians to the grave, have, amidst their sorrows, nourished heavenly hope, and enjoyed consolation sufficient to make them almost the objects of envy.

And this enemy is the "last enemy:" when *he* is destroyed, the field will be quite clear; the vast field of eternity will be free from every molestation. The mind may travel on as far as imagination can extend, and nothing will arise to discourage. This is the "last enemy;" leaving nothing more to be feared: all sin shall be absolved, the powers of darkness banished, evil inclinations eradicated, and the world destroyed. When death is vanquished, all his precursors, appendages, and consequences, shall fall with him; nothing remains but salvation, unalloyed bliss, glory, and eternal life,—an everlasting monument to the honour of the mighty Conqueror of death. Well may he be styled the "King of kings," and the "Lord of lords;" worthy to receive a name, a "new name," exalted "above every other name," "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess"* him to be Lord of all! Never was there another being, much less a being in our nature, who ever thought of gaining such a victory, ever thought of lifting up a weapon, or aiming a stroke, in such a conflict. But Jesus has "led captivity captive;"† he has swallowed up death in victory.

I speak to dying men, and cannot conclude without addressing a word to those who have no acquaintance with Christ, no vital union with him, no comfort in his promises. You may have surmounted many difficulties, been conducted through scenes of trial, gained some advantage over certain enemies, obtained great prosperity

* Phil. ii. 9—11. † Eph. iv. 8.

in the world, and may be ready to say, "Soul, take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for many years;" but forget not that there is another enemy yet to contend with; that a dreadful battle remains to be fought, and by no power of your own can you overcome. There is an adversary at the *end* of your path: he adds to the tyranny all the caprice which is common to arbitrary powers; he delights to strike into the dust those who are most exalted; he loves to shoot his arrows at a shining mark, and suddenly to fall upon those who are least apprehensive.

Whether you are aware of this enemy or not, whether you foresee his approach or not he will meet you, and engage you in a greater conflict than you have ever yet sustained. You must conquer, or be defeated and lost for ever. But you have no power to overcome, to appease, to deceive, to turn away, or to escape from this strong adversary. There is, however, a proclamation proceeding from the Saviour, in the gospel: "I am the resurrection, and the life; whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die."* "The hour is coming, when they that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth."† "Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."‡ "Wherefore, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord;" their spirits repose in his bosom; even their dust is precious in his sight, and he watches over it till he shall fashion it anew; and, in body and spirit, they shall be heirs of immortality and partakers of his glory for ever and ever.

What then remains for my dying hearers? Some of you will, perhaps, never hear another sermon; all are liable soon and suddenly to fall; none of you can escape, none can find comfort but in the Saviour, and in his gospel. What then remains? What is your wisdom? What does sound common sense dictate, but that you should make an immediate application to the Saviour, and place an entire confidence in him; that you should pray for his Spirit, and seek its constant guidance? Let me

* John xi. 25, 26. † John v. 28, 29 1 Thess. iv. 14.

entreat you that are young to consider that your covenant with death will soon be at an end. Youth is often the victim of this enemy; and he, whom they think will come late, because he is the last enemy on earth, frequently levels those to the dust who bid fair to flourish for years to come.

Some of you have advanced far in the path of life; grey hairs are here and there upon you; others observe your approach to the cave of the last enemy;—the feebleness of your voice, the wrinkles on your forehead, the decay of your vigour, forebode your last conflict, while you are buried amidst the cares of life, and think nothing of death. "This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation," that men so near to eternity will not look to the Saviour, nor direct a single thought to heaven, nor offer up one prayer to secure the immortal crown.

Prepare for death! You cannot be prepared but by repentance and faith. "This is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent:"* not merely to hear of Christ, or speak of him, or profess him; but to *know* him: to have fellowship with him; to have an interest in him; to receive him as your friend, while you submit to his sceptre. If you have not yet submitted to the Saviour, when you come to the end of life, what can you carry with you? What can you retain but an immortal nature, a consciousness of right and wrong, and therefore of your own deserts?—an awful responsibility!

"After death is the judgement." What is to shield you in judgement from the stroke of vengeance? Have you been hearing the calls of the gospel, sabbath after sabbath, without regarding them? Have you not applied the truth to yourselves? O, retreat now from the snares of the world; shut your eyes upon the scenes of time, on which they must soon be closed for ever. Converse with the world to come; endeavour to yield to the power of it: look at "the things which are not seen;" walk, as it

* John xvii. 3.

were, upon the borders of the ocean of eternity, and listen to the sound of its waters till you are deaf to every sound besides.

The blessed Saviour, who, when he was upon earth, raised the dead and healed all manner of diseases, is able to heal your spiritual maladies, and to raise you from the dead. He is exalted for this purpose: the "river of life" flows from his side; he invites you to partake of it; "the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."* In the blessed Saviour are all the springs of pardon, grace, and everlasting consolation; he will guide you through every scene, give you victory over death, admit you through the gates into the city, and there he will "wipe away all tears from your eyes;"† he will dwell with you, and you with him; and you shall be "kings and priests unto God" for ever.

When you meet with the next suggestion to infidelity, the next temptation to sin, ask whether those who tempt you can confute the declarations of Jesus Christ; whether they can give such evidence of the falsehood, as he gives of the truth, of his sayings; whether they can offer any thing that is worthy of being put in competition with the blessings he promises: whether all the world affords,—even if it could be prolonged to eternity, which cannot be,—would be equal to the blessings of eternal and heavenly glory? If not, turn from them; spurn them away; "lay hold on eternal life," and say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

* Rev. xxii. 17. † Rev. xxi. 4.

X.

THE SUCCESS OF MISSIONS DEPENDS UPON THE AGENCY OF THE SPIRIT.*

[PREACHED AT THE BAPTIST MISSIONARY MEETING AT CAMBRIDGE, OCTOBER 6, 1819.]

ISA. xxxii. 13—15.—*Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city; because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.*

THIS chapter contains a very evident prophecy of the appearance and the kingdom of Christ, as you may perceive by referring to the first part of it. Contrary to what might be expected, the prophet turns aside; and, instead of finishing the painting of that beautiful scene of things which might be anticipated as the effect of this appearance, he proceeds to paint a scene of great desolation, of great barrenness, in the words which have now been read to you. Agreeably to this, the actual effect of our Saviour's manifestation, with respect to the people to whom he more immediately came, was by no means such as might be expected. After gathering a few out of that nation, and thus planting the first christian church, God retired from them on account of their impenitence and unbelief; and the land is still abandoned to that desolation and barrenness which are here represented.

Under these figures we are probably principally called to notice the spiritual barrenness, the spiritual blindness, hardness, and impenitence of heart, which have befallen that despised people, and under which they at present labour. It is said, in the words now read, that this unhappy state will continue to a certain point of time, or rather till the arrival of a certain important event;—that

* Printed from the notes of W. B. Gurney, Esq., collated and blended with those of the Rev. S. Hillyard.

event is predicted in the last verse. If it were asked the prophet, How long shall the predicted state of desolation last? he answers, "Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." Thus the prophet teaches us, that the desolations will not come to an end, until in consequence of great changes, and the improvement of the moral condition of men, there shall arise a state of prosperity by which the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and that which is now so esteemed, shall be counted in comparison a forest.

Though the immediate bearing of these words is, in all probability, upon the state and prospects of the Jewish people; yet, by parity of reasoning, it may be extended much farther, and may be considered as assigning the reason why the nations of the earth continue in so wretched a state, with respect to things spiritual and divine, as that which they now exhibit; and they may be considered as directing our expectations, and regulating our confidence, respecting the final termination of this state of things; teaching that it will come to an end,—that a great and beneficial change will take place, but not till the Spirit be poured out from on high. Then, and not till then, will "the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest."

Considered in this light, these words bear a very close relation to the subject of our present meeting, and tend to regulate our views and expectations respecting the success of that great work, with a view to the promotion of which we are at this time assembled in the presence of the Almighty; and may allay that dissatisfaction and discontent, so far as it borders on repining, which the comparatively small success attending the proclamation of the gospel in the present times might excite; while it serves to strengthen our faith in the promise of that Being, who, as he has afforded this hope, is abundantly able to accomplish it by that mighty power by which he will "subdue all things unto himself."

The great and momentous truth taught in this passage, you perceive, my brethren, is, that the ultimate success

of missions,—of the proclamation of the gospel, in short in every form,—depends upon the communication of the Spirit; and that its perfect success can be effected only in consequence of that Spirit being "poured down from on high." It is this momentous truth, and the proper improvement of it, to which, on the present occasion, I shall request your serious attention.

That the Spirit of God is afforded at present to the church is evident from its existence; for, since the church is entirely a spiritual structure, raised and preserved by that divine Spirit, if it had been utterly withdrawn, the church would have been annihilated Every member of that church is the production of the Spirit, quickened by the Spirit, and moulded to accord with the foundation-stone upon which, by faith, it is built. We cannot, therefore, for a moment contemplate the total withdrawment of the Spirit of God, either as an event that has taken place since the first proclamation of christianity, or as one that is to be apprehended. We witness many pleasing instances, in our congregations and churches, of divine communications to the mind,—of hearts opened to "receive the truth in the love of it," and brought into willing captivity to Christ; instances as clearly verified as those we read of in the New Testament. But still, though the Spirit of God is not utterly withdrawn, that especial time has not arrived which is here announced; the Spirit is not "poured from on high" in that plenitude and variety of gifts which may be reasonably expected. A few drops of this sacred influence descend here and there; but it by no means descends in so copious a shower, nor so widely diffuses that spiritual fertility which the Scriptures give us reason to anticipate: it is not "poured from on high."

That the success, the ultimate and complete success of missions depends upon the outpouring of the Spirit of God, appears to be manifest from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. This involves a doctrine so familiar to your apprehensions who are acquainted with "the truth as it is in Jesus," that it would be needless to accumulate all the proofs the Scripture would supply; a

few passages only are necessary. Our text is one of this kind. In the prophecies of Isaiah you find frequent passages of Scripture which represent that the work of diffusing christianity is to be throughout truly the work of God; is to be distinguished as such by every serious spectator. Thus we are told that he will plant "in the wilderness the cedar tree, the shittah tree, and the myrtle and the oil tree, that he will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it;" plainly implying that the bringing in of the heathen nations, as well as the conversion of the Jews, is so much the work of God, that it will be made conspicuous to all true believers.

When the conversion of the Jews, which must be supposed to be effected by the same sort of agency, is announced by the prophet Zechariah, it is in these words: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon, in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart." The prophet Zechariah, in order to encourage Zerubbabel in the building of the temple,—where an eminent type is presented of the Messiah, the great Restorer of the temple of God, who is announced under the appellation of the True Branch,—says, it is "not by power, nor by might, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

The passage in Joel, when cited by St. Peter* on the day of Pentecost, he refers to the events of that day; and though this may seem to break in upon our doctrine, yet, when truly considered, it confirms it; for we are not to consider this as fulfilled merely at one period, but at different stages; as verified at different eras, and as pointing out a steady series of operations of the Divine Being, effected by the same sort of agency, and for the same purpose, at different periods of the gospel dispensation, all comprehended under the general term, "*the last days.*" If mere human agency would avail, no reason can be assigned why it should not have been sufficient, at that time, for the conversion of the Jews; as well as for the conversion of the Gentiles at present. But we know that the conversion of the Jews was the effect of the miraculous effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost; and we have reason to suppose there will be a like effusion, before the consummation of all things; one which will realise more fully the prediction of the prophet Joel: for he does not change one man by one means, and another by one that is totally different; and one nation by one kind of agency, and another by another; but the mode in which he proceeds, and the nature of the materials employed, are, with regard to Him, just as uniform as the nature of the work to be accomplished. Wherever the diffusion of the gospel is presented to us in the Old Testament, in a course of prophetic annunciation, the hand of God is always the object to which it is referred; it is perpetually claimed as his work; and the most magnificent expressions are used to represent this work in distinction from any other. The prophet Jeremiah declares that a new covenant shall be made, distinct from that made with their forefathers, by which God will undertake to put his "law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; that he will be their God, and that they shall be his people." Who can possibly suppose this can intend any thing else but the real agency of the Spirit of God? For by what words can that be

* Acts ii. 17.

more aptly represented than by the Divine Spirit, who wrote with his own finger, on the stony tables, the words of the law, and who will inscribe his precepts on "the fleshly tables of the heart?" When the Divine Being informs the Jews, that after a long series of desolations and judgements, he shall bring to a close their captivities, painting it in very delightful colours, he says, "And I will no more hide my face from them; for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God."*

In the New Testament, we learn that the great Captain of our salvation did not encounter the powers of darkness, or enter upon his work, till he was anointed by the Spirit of God: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bound, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." He, though a personage of such a divine and extraordinary character, yet, considered as an instrument in this work, (with reverence be it spoken,) was not qualified for it till the Spirit had descended upon him; and, when he went into the wilderness, he was filled with the Spirit. His apostles also were made fit for their work by the effusion of the Spirit from on high, on the day of Pentecost; till that time they were not qualified for their work in the nations to which they were to be sent. And though I am aware it may be said, this respects the conferring of miraculous gifts, yet, be it recollected, that we find as great a change in the moral state of the disciples; from being ignorant, secular, and pusillanimous, they were brought into a most blessed frame of mind; they were truly enlightened, and transformed at once into heroes of zeal and piety. There appeared as great a change in their affections and hearts: they were as much purified and refined from their former selves, as they were distinguished by the possession of miraculous gifts.

* Ezek. xxxix. 29.

Wherever the apostles had any distinguished success in the ministry of the gospel, they certainly remind us of its being effected by a divine agency. If they preached with success at Antioch, where it appears that their ministry was attended with great benefit, it is announced in these words: "And the hand of the Lord was with them." When Paul had preached the gospel to the heathen after having been committed with Barnabas to the work of the Lord to which they were sent, they represented to the church "how God had opened a way to the Gentiles:" and the Jewish christians were compelled, we are told, to magnify the grace of God in communicating this blessing to them; and they did it in these words: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." If Lydia was converted to the faith of Christ, we are told it was because "the Lord had opened her heart to attend to the things that were spoken." How clear and decided, again, is the language of Paul, when speaking on this subject!—"Who, then, is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase; so then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." Sincere and faithful preachers of the gospel, then, as far as they have been successful in the work, even from the very beginning, from the first communication of divine truth, have uniformly represented it as the work of God, as the work of his Spirit, independent of the instrumentality which he employed in the ministry of the word: those instruments themselves considered it as the work of God to confer success on their labours by the power of his Spirit. It is evident, from the nature of the thing, that it must be so; for, considering the state of man, it is impossible to suppose that any thing less than a divine power can change the heart. If the state of man be a state of trespasses and sins,—if "the carnal mind be enmity against God,"—how is it possible that from such elements as these can spring pure and ardent love to the Divine Being, but in consequence of a divine power? "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Were it

the design of God merely to build on a foundation already laid, or to repair a dilapidated edifice, one might talk of the efficacy of human suasion; but when that which is to be done is to create a new principle, to pour new life into the soul, to give "a new heart," to plant new seeds in a soil where all has been barrenness and desolation, to turn the waters into new channels, to effect a total change of heart and character,—what can accomplish all this but an almighty power? Hence the Scriptures represent it as a creation of new organs; giving eyes to see and ears to hear, that we may see, and hear, and understand, and feel, as we never did before. It is represented as quickening the dead, and this "according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ Jesus, when he raised him from the dead." Thus "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Faith is the great principle of this change, and *it* is "the gift of God," and is of grace; for, "by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." "To you," says the same apostle, "it is *given*, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." What is more manifest than that this language implies that believing is always the effect of divine grace? We allow, indeed, most cheerfully and thankfully that the gospel is the instrument of God, and wonderfully fitted by him for his work; but even *it* is nothing more than an instrument; and when it is successful and baffles every human effort exerted against it, it is beeause it is wielded by an omnipotent arm. The gospel of God, when directed by the wisdom of God and urged by his energy, none can withstand.

Human suasion can operate only on principles which already exist. When Demosthenes, with his powerful eloquence, excited the Athenians to combat, he only called into action, by a skilful grouping of motives, and an appropriate exercise of his genius, principles already existing, but which had lain dormant. He created nothing new; he transformed them not into new creatures; but only roused and stimulated those principles which had animated the bosoms of nations in resisting

tyranny in every age. But when the apostles went forth to preach faith in Christ, they enforced and demanded, if I may so say, a state of things of which there had been no instance:—they proposed to make a change in the mind and heart of man to which there was no natural tendency; they required a creature "dead in trespasses and sins" to awake to Christ; they proposed to convert him into a devoted servant, a subject most loyal, most affectionate, and ardent: and how was it possible that mere human art or force could effect such changes as these?

It is worthy of observation, that those who have had the greatest success in preaching the gospel in heathen nations, as well as in christian lands, have ever been the most deeply convinced of this important truth; a truth they enforced in every stage of the progress of the gospel, and which, instead of producing discouragement, only awakened greater ardour: their strength appeared only to lie in an implicit confidence in Him whose energy is all-sufficient, and who has so fully declared his willingness to exert it. Thus, Brainerd, and Schwartz, and Eliot, and those in every age who have had the greatest success in turning men to righteousness, have been the first to declare that they were nothing. They of all men, most ardently implored, and most entirely depended upon, the agency we are now contemplating; and their success appears to have been more in proportion to their earnest solicitude in seeking this blessing, this divine agency, than to any other cause whatsoever. Now, if we see men accomplish a great and extraordinary work, and those who are most successful in it ascribing their success to a particular cause, would it not be presumption in us, who know nothing of the matter, to doubt their testimony? If success were to be considered as a test as to the manner in which the effect has been produced, in what other instances are persons who are mere spectators, who have taken no care to collect information on the subject, held to be better judges than those who have "borne the burden and heat of the day," and have had in proportion to their success, the deepest con-

sciousness that they were nothing,—that they merely "planted and watered, but that it was God who gave the increase?"

Those who do not believe there is any agency of the Spirit of God, are so conscious that nothing else can produce the desired effect, that they do not venture into the field; but, while they despair of the conversion of men, deal out scorn upon such as are engaged in the work. They are chiefly those who either dispute against, or practically trifle with, the agency of the Spirit;—who are conscious they have no adequate power; and yet, while they feel this, pity, or affect to pity, the persons who depend on resources with which they are unacquainted, and whose value, therefore, they are unable to estimate. This is a plain matter of fact.

There is a class of professed christians in this country, (I would not use any invidious terms,) who formally deny the great doctrine of the influence of the Spirit; and, with regard to that denomination generally, containing many men of great talents and high respectability, what has been their conduct—what the sentiments they have evinced? A complete hopelessness of the least success, and a corresponding inactivity in calling on the idolater to abandon his idols, and wait for the Son of God from heaven. Look at those classes of christians who are disposed to feel the greatest distrust of the conversion of the heathen. Is not that distrust founded on a real disbelief of the agency of the Spirit? Hence they satisfy themselves with cavilling at the supposed insufficiency of the instruments employed, on the supposition that those persons are agents; while they themselves feel that they are no more than the pencil, the style, by which the Lord engraved the precepts on "the tables of stone," and that they are that by which the Spirit of God writes it "upon the fleshly tables of the heart." Look, on the other hand, at the history of those who have been the most successful missionaries to the heathen, and see whether you cannot trace certain results for which you cannot account on any other hypothesis than that most momentous one of a divine influence, at cer-

tain periods, accompanying their labours. In the history of Brainerd and Eliot, and others, you perceive that for a considerable time, there seem to have been the same efforts employed, the same doctrines taught, the same earnest and zealous prayers, and the same watchfulness over their own hearts, and yet no saving effect produced on others: all still remained barren; no desirable movement of the heart was excited; and this continued for a long period. Such was the state of things when Brainerd first undertook the mission to the Indians: but, after a considerable time, while he was propounding only the same doctrines, and using only the same means, the Spirit of God appeared to put forth its energy, and divine communication was imparted at one season "like a rushing, mighty wind," at others, "like the dew and the rain from heaven," softening and thus opening, the heart which had resisted the entrance of sacred truth, and causing the tear of genuine penitence to steal down the cheek. Nobody could doubt that there was some one greater than a missionary there; —that the Spirit of God had changed the barren soil to sacred ground, and had wetted it, like "Gideon's fleece, with the dews of heaven." And so it is, my brethren, that every person who has had any long acquaintance with the christian ministry, is aware that there are certain periods of barrenness, and certain periods for bearing fruit. The same talents, whether great or small, may be brought into action; but there shall be some seasons in which no good shall be crowned with extraordinary success.

There are two reasons why we are in danger, even if we believe this doctrine, of losing sight of its true bearing and importance.

In the first place, one reason why it is difficult to depend, as we ought, on the agency of the Spirit, and yet continue active, is, that it is not matter of consultation, and that it cannot immediately and directly enter into the regulation of the choice of expedients, or the adoption of measures. It is altogether an affair, a secret, of the Divine Being: it cannot, in any degree, be

subjected to our control, and, therefore, it cannot be the subject of our counsel. We are called upon to exert ourselves as much in the same way, to employ the same sort of instrumentality, to set on foot the same means, as though there were no such doctrine existing in our creed, and no such expectation existing in our minds. The consequence is, we are very apt to lose sight, even while strenuously attending to our duty, in some measure, of that mysterious and divine agency on which the success of all our efforts must depend. The most busy husbandman is not always the one who sees most clearly his dependence on the sun or the rain: and while good men may be exerting their utmost prudence, and their utmost zeal, for the diffusion of christianity among the heathen, they are in great danger of losing sight of their dependence on the invisible agency of the Divine Spirit, in directing their attention exclusively to the apparatus they are setting in motion.

Another reason probably is, that this is an invisible power; whereas our own actions and plans are objects of distinct observation. The energy of the Divine Spirit is to be seen only in its effects. It is a mysterious hidden agency; while the plans we form furnish objects of sensation and observation: and such is the miserable littleness of the human mind, after all, that we are more struck with "sparks of our own kindling," than with the light of heaven;—more occupied in looking at the instrumentality, than in impressing upon our minds the mysterious and potent energy of the Almighty. It is one thing to *believe* that there is an agency of the Spirit, and gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, to render christianity beneficial to men; and quite another thing to have *a deep and practical persuasion* of it, and to regulate all our feelings and expectations, on the momentous subject of converting the world, by a continual reference to this most interesting truth.

Here, then, permit me, for a few moments, to point out what appears to be the proper practical improvement of the truth, that the success of missions depends on the agency of the Divine Spirit. If this be a fact, my

brethren, it necessarily teaches us our dependence on God, and, consequently it ought to engage us to attempt the work of evangelizing the heathen, with the greatest humility, and the most profound annihilation of self; with a perfect renunciation of our own strength and of our own resources. These are absolute prerequisites to a true dependence on God. While we use our own resources, we must, in a measure, distrust them, and pray to God that we may use them aright. We can do nothing towards putting in motion the only agency from which any permanent result of the right kind can flow. I say nothing, absolutely nothing: and yet we must exert our instrumentality; for mere instruments are nothing, apart from the divine agency included in the promise. Separate from the hand which wields us,—from the volition of the Divine Being,—and from the agency of that Spirit which is included in this promise,—we are, I repeat it, absolutely nothing. Any false confidence, therefore, such as suggests itself probably to men who have been teachers of other sciences,—any of that elation of mind, or confidence in our own strength, which has given, perhaps, nerve and elevation to human courage,—is out of place here. The apostle was the greatest of all men in this matter: but how was he affected? He tells the Corinthians, that he was with them "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling;" his work was watered with tears and with prayer; he felt himself a worm in the presence of the great Agent: and hence it was that he was enabled to "thresh mountains." There was always in his mind a deep sentiment of humility, and a powerful conviction of the presence of the Divine Being.

The rain is not more necessary to raise the seed, the sun is not more necessary to bring it to maturity, than this work of the Spirit. Hence, I would observe, prayer appears to be of the utmost importance in connexion with every attempt for the conversion of the heathen nations. Prayer appears, indeed, to be the appropriate duty of such as desire their conversion: prayer in the closet; prayer on those seasons on which they are consult-

ing as to their plans of operation. It was while the church at Antioch were waiting on the Lord,and fasting, that the Holy Ghost said, "Separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." It was by prayer they were commended to the work for which they were designed. If the Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, it was when they were "all with one accord in one place." It appears that, in every period of the world, prayer, a spirit of prayer for this great object, has been the precursor of real success. More than sixty years ago, as several of you are, I doubt not, aware, a union among real christians for extraordinary prayer began to manifest itself. It first appeared in America, and was most warmly recommended by President Edwards: thence it was transferred to Scotland, by the instrumentality of the venerable Dr. Erskine; and from thence into England, by our valuable friend, Dr. Ryland, at the commencement of the baptist mission; and the excellent practice was soon adopted by pious men of other persuasions. Never is a mission more likely to prosper, than when it is begun in the spirit of ardent prayer and supplication. And if ever this spirit departs from us, "the glory is departed" from this mission: if ever we cease to mingle the spirit of devotion with these services, we may succeed in outward means, we may multiply and extend them, but we shall never see the conversion of the heathen. Prayer touches the only spring that can possibly ensure success. By speaking we move man; but by prayer we move God. It is through the medium of prayer that the littleness and meanness of man prevail with Omnipotence. "The prayer of faith" is the only power in the universe to which the great Jehovah yields: he looks upon every other power as more or less opposed to him; but he looks upon this as a confession of man's dependence, as an appropriate homage to his greatness, as an attraction which brings down his divine agency to the earth.

Here every one may assist missions: and every tear in the closet, every pang in the heart over the miseries of those who are dead in their sins, every prayer lifted

up in that retirement where no eye sees but the eye of Him "which seeth in secret," affords a most important benefit. These are the elements of success; these the pledges of final triumph. You know it has been customary for a considerable time, for a special season of prayer to be set apart in our society, and among christians of other denominations, for the conversion of the heathen. On the fervour of these supplications, through the intercession of the great Mediator, will, I have no doubt, depend the final realization of our hopes in the conversion of the nations to the faith of Christ.

It necessarily results from the doctrine of the text, that we ought to be exceedingly careful not to "grieve the Spirit of God." He is the great Agent; and we must expect to succeed in proportion only as we shall gratify that Holy Spirit. You know the tempers which grieve that Spirit; you know that "all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envyings, and evil speaking, and bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour," are directly opposed to His nature,—that they are an element in which He never moves; but that meekness, and gentleness, and forgiveness of injuries, and love, and joy, and peace, and long-suffering, and goodness, and faith, and temperance,—that the lamb-like virtues of Jesus Christ, are those in which he delights. You know the graces of the Spirit of God, which he imparted to Jesus Christ, are still the object of his predilection, and that he cannot dwell amongst us any farther than he nourishes those dispositions in us; that He who first gave the Spirit, still gives the same Spirit and no other; we can expect no triumphant success of his gospel, or his kingdom, but in proportion as we are "anointed by the Spirit:" for, as the oil ran down to the skirts of Aaron's garment," so his holy influences anoint the heart of every true disciple. Let us take care, then, that in the management of this mission there be nothing in our conduct or temper opposed to the simplicity and purity of the christian dispensation. Let us take care, as individuals and as churches, that we walk in the fear of the Lord; and that we look thus to have

the consolations of the Holy Ghost, to be edified and multiplied.

There does not appear to me to be a more important maxim than that contained in Luke xvii. 20,—"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation;" or as Doctor Campbell renders it, "*is not ushered in with pomp and parade.*" If this mission is made the instrument of ostentation and gratification, or of amusing the public by a display of gaudy eloquence,—if it is conducted on such a plan as comports rather with the maxims of this world than with "the mind of Christ,"—the usefulness of the society is in that measure destroyed. If it is conducted without prayer, which I am sorry to say has not always been sufficiently regarded, nothing can be more calculated to "grieve the Holy Spirit." My brethren, if we look at the manner in which those missions were first conducted, which converted the whole world, we shall find that they were destitute of all human parade, and were conducted with extraordinary simplicity. It was, as I have said, while the church ministered and fasted that they were directed "to send forth Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto they had been called." There were no places sought out as places of theatrical resort; such things were not thought of at that time; nor *could* they be thought of by those who formed themselves solely upon the simplicity of the Scriptures. It is not my wish to give offence to any persons by these remarks: but I could not discharge my conscience as a minister of Christ without making them; not at all with a view to censuring what has been done, or blaming any individual in the present assembly, but of lifting up my voice against certain dangers to which the corruption of our nature and the state of the world expose us.

All rivalry, also, between different societies for the purpose of promoting missions,—all that rivalry which has not for its object and design the promoting the cause, the knowledge, and the service of God,—is offensive in his sight. Let us guard against that vicious rivalry which shall induce the least disposition to depre-

ciate or hide in silence the success of others; which shall lead us to look coolly on the most splendid acts of missionary labour, unless they emanate from ourselves, or bring honour to our party. All these dispositions, as far as they exist in any individual, or any society, dispositions which are "of the flesh, and not of the Spirit," are directly contrary to the mind of Jesus Christ, who blended a Paul and an Apollos, who blended the Jews and the Gentiles—men of all characters—in one mass, and impressed upon them all the faith of Christ and the love of immortal souls.

It necessarily results from the doctrine of the text, that all dependence on any other resource than that of the communication of the Spirit, will be found to be delusive, when the Divine Being shows us what work is his own. To "put our trust in an arm of flesh," is to renounce our dependence upon him. There cannot be a double dependence, any more than a double adherence. It is true men must be employed; but the fact of their mere instrumentality should never be lost sight of, and their dependence on the Spirit of God should be ever recognised. "The gold is mine," saith the Lord, "and the silver is mine." Let us not speak on this all-important subject in such a manner as to lead to the idea that the obtaining of money, and the setting in motion a vast apparatus, is all that is necessary to secure the salvation of the heathen. Any language like this is in direct opposition to the doctrine of the Scriptures. If the Spirit of God be the great agent,—if it be his work, and his work alone, and the whole is accomplished by the energy of that mighty Spirit,—how can we secure success by any other agency? If we should depend on the accumulation of more property, and should succeed in that respect, far beyond our present resources; yet if the Divine Being were to withdraw from us his sacred and enlivening influences, he would leave us in the same situation as he did the Jews, when he said, "Where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble."* They

* Jer. ii. 28.

might multiply instruments and extend their labour, but they could not secure the salvation of a single soul—they could not deposit *in the heart* a single sentence of divine truth—they could not form one holy disposition: but if the Spirit of God "be poured out upon us," as we have reason to believe it will be at some time, every other instrument will be subordinated, and must be; and then it will be found that the Divine Being, when he has poured out his Spirit, will never suffer an adequate quantity of property to be wanted. He who has given the Spirit will never suffer his work to be stopped by the want of the riches of the earth: he will sooner turn the very stones of the street into the precious metals, than suffer the means to be wanted of carrying on this work. My brethren, if we can once draw down the Spirit of God on our churches, the rich will contribute their property; the pious will contribute their prayers, and so much of their property as they can afford; and the leisurely will give up their time. This divine agency, when its effects are once really felt in the heart, will enlist into its service every power which men possess, and will compel it to yield its quota. "Thou shalt see, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory."

Finally, I would just observe, that the doctrine of the text teaches us to regulate our confidence with respect to the success of every particular mission, at the same time that it animates that confidence in regard to the final success of the work itself. We cannot say how long the Spirit may be withheld; but that it is withheld, that the outpouring of it has not yet taken place, we have melancholy evidence. It is plain that it has not been

vouchsafed to this society, or to any other, to the extent that we anticipated, so as to produce a total transformation. Great effect has been experienced in the South-Sea islands; and that appears to me to approach the nearest of any thing to what we are expecting; but even that, delightful as it is, is on a small scale. But the general success has not yet seemed proportional to the extent of the means. "The wood is prepared for the altar, but the fire from heaven has not descended upon the sacrifice." The number of missionaries is as great, probably, as that employed at the first promulgation of christianity; but here is the mighty difference,—the Spirit of God, at that period, descended from on high: the Divine Being "bowed the heavens and came down," and infused an immortal energy into the missionaries, to which we are strangers at the present day.

It is proper to inquire, why is not the Spirit of God poured down now?—what is there that has caused the withholding of this Spirit? We may be assured there is some reason. The Divine Being is a sovereign, but he is not a capricious being; and we ought to plead with God, and ask why it is that he withholds from us this Spirit? We may be assured the time will arrive when deliverance will be wrought in the earth; but hitherto we have "brought forth wind,"—only wind. He "hath not wrought deliverance," though we know deliverance will be wrought. May we not, in the spirit of humble supplication, ask, Why that honour is reserved for other nations and other times?—Why we are permitted to see only the skirt of his garment, and not permitted to see his face?—Why he holds back his blessings, and we contemplate only a few drops of that mighty influence of which the heavens are full, and which he might, and doubtless will, pour down in copious torrents? My brethren, let the friends of each society, instead of being led for a moment "to sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag,"—while they are thankful for what has been done,—inquire why they are not permitted to do more, and why the adamantine barriers of impenitence and rejection are permitted to oppose themselves?

Propose this question to the philosopher, and he will repeat the language of the ancient prophet, and say, "Hath a nation changed its gods, which are yet no gods?"* We know, my brethren, that no nation ever quitted its gods till Jesus Christ came into the world: we know that no nation has forsaken actual idolatry, much less turned from things present to realise an immortal prospect—to fix its affections on God as the eternal God, except by the energy of the Spirit; but we are encouraged to expect the power and grace of God to accomplish these purposes, and we hear him saying in his word, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this:" and if there be something rendering us unworthy to be the instruments of so great and important a change, let us search it out, and mourn for it before God.

At the same time, my brethren, though we are taught to acquiesce without repining, without murmuring, in the dispensations of God, let us point our views to a future period, when the Spirit will be poured from on high,—when Jesus Christ will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, —for then "the wilderness shall become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." The Divine Being will not frustrate the design his Spirit has excited; he will not cause the holy agitations which have been felt to be in vain; he will not suffer those desires which have been excited in the minds of Carey and others to evaporate without being in some manner fulfilled. Great things have been effected by the instrumentality of those who have gone before us, and we are now employed in the same great work. How many thousands are pouring out their prayers and tears for the spiritual conversion of the heathen! There has been a spiritual movement of divine love whereby many have been rendered willing to spend and be spent, yea, to die for the conversion of the Gentile nations; earnestly desiring to conduct them to the Saviour whom they never saw, but "in whom they believed, and rejoiced with joy unspeakable." But when this Spirit has come from on high, we shall wit-

* Jer. ii. 11.

ness a different scene, going far beyond the desire and the effort: then it will be a most glorious æra: we shall see nations casting off their idols, returning to God, "asking the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward;" then will be again "heard, on the high places, weeping and supplication because they have perverted their way, and forgotten the Lord their God:" then there will be heard, not the cry of the wounded, nor the lamentation of the orphan and the fatherless over parents slain in battle, but sorrow of a more sacred nature; a new burthen pressing on the heart—the burthen of sin. They will look back on the sufferings of Jesus Christ in the garden of Gethsemane and at the cross, and feel as much oppressed as if they had heard his groans and his prayers; they will then believe the simple sayings of God; "the powers of the world to come," the greatness of eternity, will occupy their attention; they will then look "not at the things which are seen and temporal," but at the sublime and glorious "things which are eternal;" the distance between that period and the judgement day will, in thought, be annihilated; they will feel themselves standing on the threshold of the infinite and everlasting mansion, and their whole souls will be absorbed in the nothingness of time, the grandeur of eternity, the awful hurtfulness of sin, and the infinite importance of the great salvation. Those things which we speak of with freezing accents and cold hearts, will then be felt in the inmost soul; conviction will seize upon the transgressors, while others will be rejoicing in the Lord, and it will be as it was at the building of the second temple; "the voice of shouting, and the sound of weeping," will be mingled together, as in the time of Ezra. While troops of pilgrims will be pressing towards the celestial city, many millions of prodigals will return to their Father's house, and will lift up their eyes to the Saviour who died for their sin. These things MUST take place,—they did take place at the first preaching of the gospel, and will again be witnessed. By some, such occurrences would be regarded as disorderly. God be praised, there were such disorders as these, and well would it be for

us were our religious assemblies frequently interrupted by such disorders. The time will come, assuredly, when "the Spirit will be poured from on high;" and who knows what will be the effect when the Divine Being applies the truths of his word to the consciences of his creatures? Then will "the wilderness become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest:" then, my brethren, all the powers of nature, all the resources of providence, all the advantages that are possessed by men in every variety and state, will jointly contribute to aid the general triumph. "The multitude of camels shall come up: the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah: all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord." Kings shall offer their gifts, and the majesty of all earthly sovereigns will bow to the majesty of the Saviour. All the spoils of earthly grandeur will be laid at his feet, and none will be "exalted in that day" but the Lord and his Messiah. This, next to our own salvation, is the highest and most proper object of our solicitude: if we can but attain this,—if we can but witness this,—every thing else will follow: this touches the source and author of all motion; and in proportion as we can engage the Divine Spirit on our side, in that proportion will Omnipotence be exerted, and who can stay his hand?

There are some who do not expect these scenes to be realised; but we say to them, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God."* Before him all difficulties vanish; it is only the exertion of the same sort of power as every sincere christian has witnessed,—the power of which he is himself the subject; and what reason can he assign why he should have been touched by the Divine Spirit,—"made willing in the day of his power,"—and the same power not be rendered effectual in the breasts of others? The same influence which was extended to a Paul, will effect the renovation of the world. No new power is requisite: it is the same: even

* Matt. xxii. 29.

that, without which we might "preach in vain," and you "hear in vain;" it need only to be poured from on high, and then, "the wilderness will become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." Let us, then, in our prayers, especially and earnestly entreat this divine communication. Never let us pray for the Baptist Mission, or any other, without recognizing distinctly in our prayers our dependence on the divine agency; never let us for a moment lose sight of this, but direct our attention to it as the main object of expectation and hope,—regarding it as indeed the work of God. It is his especial prerogative to renew the heart of man, and to build up, from the ruins of the fall, a temple to his praise; and when this is accomplished, "all the kingdoms of the earth will flow into it,"—the nations that are saved will walk in the light of it: and how can we, who consider ourselves "the temples of the Holy Ghost," be better employed than in imploring him to "send forth his light and his truth?" Let us address him in the language of the church: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon?" "Where is thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies?"* The church of God is now praying to this effect, and the best pledge of the final triumphs of christianity results from the combined influence of prayer and active exertion in a spirit of dependence. Our strong desire that the heathen should be converted, and that christianity should be published and received among all nations, may be regarded, we hope, as the earnest and fruit of that Divine Spirit whose more copious effusion will accomplish the work. Let us welcome the rising beam, "the day-star" that ushers in the morning of a brighter day than has ever yet shone upon the earth. Let us fervently pray that the Divine Spirit may be poured out upon the world, and that the Redeemer may "take to him his great power, and reign" universally in the hearts of men.

* Isaiah li. 9, lxiii. 15.

XI.

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.*

[PREACHED AT BRISTOL, FOR THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS, NOVEMBER 28, 1820.]

MATTHEW xvi. 1—3.—"*The Pharisees also, with the Sadducees came, and tempting him desired that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather; for the sky is red: And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day; for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites! ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*"

So violent were the prejudices excited by our Saviour's preaching, that those who could agree in nothing besides, agreed in the attempt to discredit his authority, and destroy the effects of his ministry. An instance of this is presented in the words just read, in which we find the Pharisees and Sadducees forgetting their mutual antipathy in their common hostility to the pretensions of Jesus Christ. The Pharisees, as you are aware, were a sect among the Jews, who had multiplied to an enormous extent their additions to the law of Moses; which, together with the other parts of the Old Testament, they received as inspired. The Sadducees, a sort of religious sceptics, generally supposed to have confined their belief to the missions and writings of Moses, rejected the doctrines which connect us with a future world; the resurrection of the body, and the existence of spirits. These two parties, at variance on all other occasions, concurred on this; and both, "tempting" our Lord in the hope of ruining his reputation, "desired that he would show them a sign from heaven;" an indication that he was the Messiah, yet more miraculous and convincing, according to *their* idea, than any he had before exhibited. By this "sign from heaven," they probably meant some *direct* manifestation of the divine glory,

* Printed from the notes of the Rev. Thomas Grinfield.

without that intervention of second causes which seems to have impaired in their minds the impression of the miracles they had witnessed. They imagined that an *immediate* vision of the Divine Majesty would afford an evidence of his being the Messiah, more unequivocal and satisfactory than could be afforded by any performances however supernatural. Such a notion was delusive, and arose entirely from the depraved and obdurate state of their minds. When we find those, who are already in possession of sufficient evidence, yet demanding more than is given, we may be sure that, in such cases, no evidence would be sufficient. Accordingly, it is not the practice of the divine government to comply with such unreasonable desires: but, while *he that hath*, or that improves his present advantages, *shall receive abundantly more: from him that hath not*, or that uses not what he has, *even that which he hath shall be taken away.*

From the suggestion of the words first read, I propose to consider some of the most obvious and palpable signs which the present age exhibits of the advancement of our Saviour's kingdom: and I shall take occasion to remark previously, that it is an important part of wisdom,—a duty which as christians we ought not to neglect,—to *discern the signs*, to watch the moral aspect, of the times in which we live. We are not, indeed, called or qualified to penetrate into futurity; but we may study with advantage that portion of providence, in relation to the church and the world, with which we are most nearly connected.

Of the benefits to be derived from this study, the first is, that we shall thus learn more of *the intentions and character of the Divine Being.* The providence of God is the execution and developement of his mind. In observing the course of providence, we see the operations of his hand, and read his will as truly in its fulfilment as in his written revelation. Again: our *devotion* should be modified, to a certain extent, by the signs of the times. In our prayers we may derive encouragement from these to plead with God for the accomplishment of his own gracious designs and promises: we may adapt

our humiliation to the demand of the season; acknowledge the hand that wards off impending evils or crowns us with signal favours; and be reminded what benefits we may appropriately implore. And, once more: such a habit of advertence to the prominent features of the age, may be useful in the regulation of our *active* duties. In our exertions to promote the good of mankind and the glory of God, we are not merely to regard his general will as applicable to all times alike; we are to inquire also, his particular design in reference to the existing state of things; to study what he would have us do at such a particular crisis. Does He appear, for instance, by various concurring events, to be preparing for the more extensive and rapid diffusion of the gospel? Then it becomes our appropriate duty to provide whatever means seem the best adapted to promote that transcendent object. Some persons who are sufficiently attentive to the more private details of christian duty, take but little interest in the fortunes of the universal church: a failure which, in such cases, arises principally from that inattention to the signs of the times, reprehended by our Saviour in the text.

Having offered these suggestions, I shall now advert to some plain, unequivocal, signs and indications of the present age. I call them plain and unequivocal, in distinction from such as may be thought of an ambiguous character. With respect to some of these signs, while events are passing by us, there may be differences of sentiment; differences which will probably disappear when another generation shall look back upon our own times. In contemplating an object, we find it necessary to recede to a certain distance, in order that we may the more comprehensively survey what pressed too closely, and became too prominent, during our nearer approach; and thus the present portion of providence will be better understood, in all its bearings, when the events which compose its principal features shall have been for some time passed. The following remarks, however, will be confined to the most striking peculiarities of the present age.

1. Of these, the first I shall mention is, the great in-

crease of mental exertion. Some periods have been marked by intellectual inaction: the human mind has appeared as in a state of torpor and dormancy: not a luminary has broken the prevailing darkness; not a distinguished name has been left behind: knowledge has been not merely stationary, it has not merely not been progressive, it has *retrograded.* Such was that period in which, after the decline of the Platonic philosophy, Aristotle reigned in all the schools, and was idolized as the secretary of nature, who dipt his pen in intellect. From his dictates there was no appeal; and, what was most remarkable, his empire extended to theology. As nothing can convey a higher idea of the intellectual greatness of that extraordinary man, than the unrivalled despotism he then exercised over human minds, so nothing can present a more humiliating picture of the weakness of those minds, than the depth of mental degradation to which they thus descended. The Reformation was the great instrument in undermining and demolishing that long-established system of intellectual despotism and degradation. Under the light diffused by the reformers, men awoke from the trance of ignorance and infatuation in which they had slept for ages; they felt those energies of thought and reason which had been so long disused; they began to investigate truth for themselves; they started to that career of genius and science which has ever since been rapidly advancing. Had this been the only benefit it produced, the protestant reformation would deserve to be numbered among the noblest achievements of mental energy: viewing it in this light, even infidels have applauded Luther and his associates.

Since that era the greatest advances have been made in every department of science, physical and moral; more especially during the last century, in which the progress of knowledge has been more rapid than, perhaps, during any similar period of human history. In addition even to the grand discoveries of Newton, respecting the laws of nature and the system of the universe, such a mass of varied information has been accumulated, that Newton himself, could he witness the pre-

sent state of his own science, would be astonished at advances he never anticipated. Every year, nay, almost every day, has added something; while the registers of discovery have found it no easy task to keep pace with the rapidity of its march. The nomenclature of the preceding fifty years has been found so inadequate to the demands of the latter half century, that it has become entirely obsolete; and a new nomenclature may be required by another age. This is remarkably exemplified in the department of chemical science: nor has less been accomplished in moral and political philosophy. The genius of legislation has been greatly elucidated within the present age. The principle of religious toleration and liberty of conscience, which required for its demonstration the reasoning powers of the immortal Locke, is now universally acknowledged. In a word, philosophy has been completely *popularised*, and mingles with every order of society from the palace to the cottage: all approach its illumination, all participate in its benefits.

It is true that we cannot boast, in these latter times, of oratory or poetry equal to that of Demosthenes or of Milton. These arts, being derived from nature, the natural emanations of enthusiasm and fancy, are early brought to perfection; and are probably cultivated with less advantage in a more refined state of society. The case is different with respect to the pursuits of science and philosophy: these are permanently and interminably progressive: the induction of facts, the investigation of phenomena and principles, are susceptible of perpetual advancement: and, if it were preposterous to suppose that those great masters of poetry and eloquence will ever be superseded, or perhaps even equalled, it were not less preposterous to deny that the present amount of knowledge,—immense as it now appears,—may yet, to a future generation, appear comparatively inconsiderable. Invention has exhausted its powers: the stores of philosophy are inexhaustible. In every successive age, it must be allowed, the increase of science, though continual, becomes less and less observable: it is during the infancy of knowledge that its growth is most apparent;

afterwards, the vast general extent renders us less sensible of every new accession; just as in a large assemblage of buildings, like that which composes your own city, we are scarcely aware of its constant enlargement; while, in a village, every particular addition becomes an object of attention. Thus less surprise is excited in the present age, than would have been felt in any preceding period, by every fresh augmentation of our intellectual stores. It is an age of universal curiosity, in which ignorance is felt as a calamity. The extensive circulation of books, and the multitude of cultivated minds, distinguish this period beyond comparison with any that has preceded it. Never before was that prophetic feature of the latter days so strikingly exhibited—"Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

2. A second feature by which the present age is distinguished, is an increased attention to the instruction of the lower classes.

The time has been, when the education of youth in the inferior walks of society was entirely neglected: it is only during a later period that the first impulse was given to that vast machine of universal instruction, which continues to operate with increasing energy. It is painful to reflect on the unnatural separation, in whatever relates to the *mind*, which formerly subsisted between the common people and those who fill the higher ranks of the community; the monstrous chasm which divided the gross barbarism of the former from the superfluous refinement of the latter. It seemed as if an entire oblivion had taken place, in reference to their original, fraternal relation, as members of one family, children of a common father. There is little, it is true, in poverty, to gratify the taste or the imagination; but it is time, surely, to lose sight of those merely adventitious accompaniments which glitter on the eye of fancy and refinement,—time to recognize, in the humblest portions of society, partakers of our nature, with all its high prerogatives and awful destinies: it is time to remember that our distinctions are exterior and evanescent, our resemblance real and permanent; that all is tran-

sient, but what is moral and spiritual; that the only graces we can carry with us into another world, are graces of divine implantation; and that, amidst the rude incrustations of poverty and ignorance, there lurks an imperishable jewel,—a principle transcending in its value the whole material creation, — a soul, susceptible of the highest spiritual beauty, destined, perhaps, to adorn the celestial abodes, and to shine for ever in the mediatorial diadem of the Son of God! *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.*

Among the instances of an increased attention to the welfare of the lower classes, may be numbered those improvements in the penal code of our laws, which have been proposed by a living lawyer,* who appears to me at least to have understood the true nature of legal justice much better than it has been comprehended heretofore. When so much light is thrown upon a subject,—before very imperfectly investigated,—the most important amendments may be anticipated in the laws, especially those which affect the criminal's life; and we may hope the time is not distant when, in conformity with the Divine Standard, the crime of murder shall be regarded as the only proper subject of capital punishment.

In short, we appear at length to have become sensible that every thing merits our earnest attention and encouragement, which tends to promote the intellectual, moral, and civil improvement of that vast portion of the population, in which the majority of numbers and physical strength resides, and which virtually includes the destiny of the nation; that broad basis of the pyramid of society, which, while it continues sound, affords stability to the whole, but by a rent in which the entire fabric must be endangered. Nothing in nature can be conceived more frightful, nothing more fatal to the existence of an empire, than an unprincipled, profligate, irreligious, turbulent populace; quiet perhaps at the present moment, but ready on the first occasion to break out into fury and violence. It is a volcano, covered with a

* Sir James Mackintosh.

surface of verdure, but prepared to scatter desolation around on the first eruption that may disturb its fearful quiescence: it is an edifice raised upon a mine, and constantly exposed to the peril of an explosion from the precarious ground and terrible materials beneath! We have witnessed, in a neighbouring kingdom, an example of the horrors to which a nation may be subjected by the unrestrained depravity of an unrestricted and irreligious populace—horrors, which Heaven avert from ourselves! which exceed the conception of the most gigantic imagination! For nothing, in the most savage part of the brute creation, can parallel those fiery excesses of popular passion, which desolate whatever is social, whatever is sacred, in the institutions of mankind! But, on "the evils of popular ignorance," it is the less necessary to enlarge here, as the subject has been recently illustrated by a living writer,* whose genius pours new light over every topic that engages his notice.

3. A third, and a most favourable characteristic of the present times, is the improved state of preaching, and the more abundant supply of the public means of grace. The preaching of the gospel has been appointed and acknowledged by God as the grand instrument of converting sinners, and saving souls: the doctrine of Christ crucified (however it may be regarded by the disputers of this world) has been proved, in every age, to be "the power of God to the salvation of every one that believes;" to be the weakness of God, which is stronger than men; the foolishness of God which is wiser than men. During the latter part of the last century, and down to the present time, there has been a manifest increase and improvement of christian instruction. Evangelical truth has been administered in a purity and abundance to which preceding ages bear no proportion. And here, in justice to the established clergy of the realm, I cannot but remark the great advance in piety and diligence which they have exhibited during the last half century. They have gone forth in numbers, rekind-

* Rev. John Foster.

ling the lamp of heavenly truth where before it had burned with a dim and sickly ray; they have explored and cultivated many a neglected spot, into which other labourers could not (for obvious reasons) gain admission with equal facilities of influence; and far be it from any of their dissenting brethren to regard their success with any other than a godly jealousy, a holy emulation!

Turning from our own country to heathen lands, we behold yet more striking indications of an improving age. The present is the very era of missions: all the various denominations of christians, as with one great simultaneous impulse, have started up from their long slumber of missionary inaction, awakened on a sudden to the magnitude and obligation of this neglected enterprise. There seems to be an universal feeling among christians that the time is come for fulfilling our Saviour's last command, *going forth into all the world, and teaching all the nations;* and that, if we should any longer hold our peace, *the very stones in our streets would cry out against us!* The Spirit of Christ no longer contains itself within its accustomed bounds: it breaks forth from its undue confinement, and spreads its influence in every direction. No part of the earth so remote, so forsaken, that has not begun to be invaded, that is not at least proposed to be attempted, by some of those devoted champions who have gone forth in the peaceful warfare of the gospel. Nor are the symptoms of preparation less favourable among the *heathen* themselves: a general spirit of readiness appears to be presented in the islands of the Pacific, in the districts of the Cape, of India, and America. Every thing seems to announce that though the labourers are as yet but few, the fields are already white for the approaching harvest.

4. The advancement of the Bible as the great and only standard of christian faith and practice, is a fourth remarkable feature of our times. The Scriptures have always been professedly received as the highest authority among christians; but never was that authority so publicly and completely recognized as in the present age. The church of Rome early impaired, and at length

almost entirely abolished, the authority of the sacred volume, by her multiplied additions to its contents, as well as by her extreme ignorance of its genuine instructions. Her priests were exalted from humble ministers of the word into arbitrary *legislators:* for he that has the power of annexing to the law whatever interpretation he may please, is not an administrator of the law, but a *tyrant.* As an instance of the disuse and oblivion into which the Scriptures had fallen among the Romish clergy, it is related of the celebrated missionary, Xavier, that, having met with a copy of part of the New Testament before his going out to India, he resolved to take it with him, as he thought it might be of use in his missionary labours. What a change in the state of the christian world, with regard to the estimation in which the Scriptures are held, has taken place since the days of Xavier! That eminent person—who possessed, one would hope, amidst all his errors, some real piety—thought he might as well take part of the New Testament with him when he went as a missionary to India; he conceived it might possibly be of some use! The Bible is now carried abroad in the front of the ministry; and the missionary preachers aim, as much as possible, to lose themselves in the effulgence of heavenly light. It is a remarkable fact, that the most devoted, the most successful advocate, beyond comparison with any other, which the Bible Society has yet found, is himself a priest of the Romish church;* a man who presents the extraordinary phenomenon of a popish clergyman protesting, in the very bosom of his church, against her iniquities; and declaring his determination to persevere, in spite of the devil and the prophetic beast, in diffusing those Scriptures, of which he has already circulated several hundred thousand copies.

Such exertions, it is reasonable to believe, will, at no very remote period, prove instrumental to the purifying of Christendom from papal corruptions. In the event of a persecution among the Romish clergy being occa-

* Leander Van Ess.

sioned by such exertion, a secession similar to that of the protestant reformers, might probably once more take place within their own body. God grant that such may be the issue! Would to God that the apocalyptic warning might be heard and obeyed by multitudes of that corrupted hierarchy, which owes the perpetuation of its influence to the suppression of the Scriptures,—"Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues!" Never before was there such an universal consent among christians as to the supremacy and sufficiency of the Bible in all religious questions; never before was the maxim of Chillingworth so practically acknowledged, that "The Bible, the Bible alone, is the religion of protestants." In all disputed points, it is now agreed that we should appeal solely to "the law and the testimony;" and, where these are silent, that we should imitate their silence.

5. As a fifth "sign of the times," may be mentioned that increasing harmony which prevails among the genuine disciples of Jesus Christ. At last the central principle of union begins to be extensively felt and acknowledged: amidst all the diversities of external discipline or subordinate opinion, the seed of God, the principle of spiritual and immortal life implanted in the soul, is recognized by the sincere followers of the Lamb as the transcendant point of mutual attraction in the midst of minor differences. Even protestants and catholics, influenced by a kindred piety, can now cordially embrace each other; as in the case of that zealous professor of the Romish church to whom I before referred, who corresponds in terms of cordial affection with the protestant secretary of the Bible Society for its foreign department. The essential spirit of religion begins to assert its ascendancy over all besides. The most enlightened, the *selectest* christians in every denomination, are ready to cultivate an intercourse with kindred spirits, with all who hold the same essential principles, in any other. Formerly, such an intercourse was rarely indulged, and accompanied with reserves and apprehensions good men looked more at their distinctions than their resem-

blances, at points of repulsion than those of attraction. Now the case is altered; and it may be truly said that, in this respect, *the former things are passed away.* Now, the saying of our common master has received a fulfilment almost unknown before: "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, even by the love ye bear to each other.*"

The reason why christians have been so tardy in arriving at a disposition so much to be desired, is principally to be found in those exaggerated notions of the importance of church government under some particular form, which so long swayed the minds of excellent men; the difference of outward garb concealed the unity of the spirit which inwardly animated their hearts alike. In the *seminal* principles of their religion, in their equal dependence on an incarnate Redeemer and a sanctifying Spirit, they have now discovered a centre of attraction,—a common chord to which all their hearts vibrate in unison: and thus, without the smallest sacrifice of their respective sentiments or practices, they can indulge the most entire affection, and exert the most zealous co-operation. Can it be supposed that such an improvement will not silence the old sarcasm of infidels, derived from the prevailing dissensions of those who professed themselves the disciples of one Master? Can it be questioned whether the christian army, thus closely embodied, will prosecute with redoubled vigour their warfare against the powers of darkness? If the kingdom of Satan, when not divided against itself, is able to stand, can we doubt that the family of Jesus Christ, no longer disunited, will prosper in its consentaneous exertions? Besides which, the unanimity of christians is at once an indication and a presage of the Holy Spirit's more copious effusion on the church; at once an effect and an earnest of the love of Christ to his followers; while it affords a delightful emblem and foretaste of that perfect state in which all are for ever united in harmony and affection.

6. In the last place I cannot but number, among the prognostics of the destined triumph of christianity, that

extension of civil and religious liberty by which the present times are distinguished. In this view, I cannot but cordially rejoice in the political revolutions which have recently taken place in Spain, Portugal, and Naples. Nothing could be imagined more unfavourable to the cause of religion than the prior condition of those kingdoms, in which a despotic tyranny prevailed alike in the church and the state. Such revolutionary commotions among the nations must be still expected, until the arrival of that happy period when liberty, civil and religious, shall be universally established.

The enjoyment of civil liberty is essential to the developement and exertion of the best and noblest energies of the human mind. Deprived of this, nothing truly great can flourish in the moral world. There exists, indeed, an indissoluble connexion between the civil and the religious freedom of a nation; and whatever may be thought of other considerations, every friend to the prosperity of religion must rejoice in the advancement of that liberal and enlightened policy under which alone it is favoured and fostered. It is only under a free representative government that this can be the case. Never did religious liberty flourish in the chilling, deadly atmosphere of despotism: it can open and spread only in the sunshine of political freedom. As the greater includes the less, the civil implies also the religious liberty of a state. Religion grows and blooms among the highest and most palmy branches of the tree of liberty, and ripens in luxuriance amongst its topmost boughs. This is the natural, established, order of things, in the present world: and, let it be remembered, we are not entitled to expect any *miracles*, properly so called, to facilitate the coming of our Saviour's kingdom. In the whole course of missionary enterprise there has not been a single check upon the accustomed laws of providence, not one interruption of the connexion which subsists between primary and secondary causes, not one deviation from the ancient course of nature. It is by a favourable arrangement of political circumstances that religion is most likely to be advanced; by the establishment of that genuine and

legitimate freedom, which is equally removed from the extremes of anarchy on the one side, and tyranny on the other. It is this that seems to be the precise temperature, the genial climate, of religion: and doubtless God will prepare his own way in this as in every other respect: *every valley shall be exalted, every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked rendered straight, the rough places plain; and all flesh shall see the glory of the Lord; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

In glancing at the different institutions which have arisen in these latter times for the moral and spiritual benefit of mankind, it is pleasing and striking to observe how exactly they have fitted in, and, as it were, dovetailed with each other. First appeared the missionaries, as pioneers to break up the ground and open the way; then the Bible Society followed; and, at last, the system of education completed the design. Each arose, in its order, to sustain and aid the others. Had any one of these existed alone, it would have proved inefficient for want of the rest. As it is, the finger of Providence is discernible in the very succession in which these institutions made their appearance; while, in their union and co-operation, they constitute an apparatus completely adapted to promote the christian renovation of the world: regarded in the order of *means*, the teachers, the lesson, and the power of reading it, appear well adapted to *make the man of God perfect in every good word and work.* We speak, you will observe, of external, instrumental preparations: there is still needed, as you are aware, another and a higher *preparation of the heart in man;* a spirit within us, which must be imparted from above. The machinery is provided, but the Spirit alone can move the wheels.

With respect to the institution for which I have the honour to be an humble advocate on this occasion, if there be any force in the preceding remarks, few words are necessary to recommend it to your patronage. As you would live in a land of Bibles and readers of the Bible,—in a nation dignified as a seminary of religious instruction; as you would desire, when called to quit

the present stage of being, to leave your children in a nation of christians; it becomes you, more especially in a season of public alarm, to support an institution which justly assumes the name of *national.* If the man who rescues from barrenness a neglected portion of the country, and spreads over its face fertility and beauty, deserves and obtains our praise, shall *that society* solicit our support in vain, which rescues from all the evils of ignorance multitudes of those in the humbler walks of life, who might otherwise *perish for lack of knowledge;* while it opens their understandings, at least in a degree, to understand the Scriptures of eternal truth and life? It is impossible to doubt that such an institution is one of the great means which the Divine Being employs for the accomplishment of his own great end. He does not christianize the world by magic; we are not to expect religion to descend from heaven, or to rise upon the earth like a beautiful vision! It will indeed descend from heaven, and arise upon the earth: but this will be by regular, appointed, adapted means; by means such as those which are now set at work, and require our continued assistance: means which afford an omen of the desired success; since we cannot conceive why all this energy should have been impressed on the minds of men, if not for the providential accomplishment of one grand result—the transformation of the kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

XII.

THE LOVE OF LIFE.*

[PREACHED AT BRISTOL, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE BAPTIST MISSIONS, NOVEMBER, 1820.]

JOB ii. 4.—*And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.*

THOUGH these words were uttered by the father of lies, they are no lie. The truth of a communication does not always depend on the character of those who convey it.

The expression might perhaps be more properly rendered, "skin *upon* skin," or "skin *after* skin:" skins, of which the uses are not easily enumerated, being the principal article of property and exchange in a primitive and pastoral state of society.

I propose briefly to consider the principle of attachment to life, so emphatically asserted in these words; some of the reasons for which it is implanted; and some improvements which may be derived from the subject.

I. The love of life is the simplest and strongest principle of nature. It operates *universally*, on every part of the brute creation, as well as on every individual of the human race; *perpetually*, under all circumstances, the most distressing as well as the most pleasing; and with a *power* peculiar to itself,—while it arms the feeble with energy, the fearful with courage, whenever an occasion occurs for defending life, whenever the last sanctuary of nature is invaded, and its dearest treasure endangered. This mysterious principle does not act with a variable force, dependent on the caprices of will or the dictates of reason: it operates with a steady, constant influence, as a law of nature, insensible, and yet powerful. It corresponds, in the animated world, with the great principle of gravitation in the material system, or with the centripetal force, by which the planets are retained in their proper orbits, and resist

* Printed from the notes of the Rev. Thomas Grinfield.

their opposite tendency to fly off from the centre. The most wretched, not less than the most prosperous,—those who seem to possess nothing that can render life desirable, not less than those who are surrounded by all its pleasures,—are bound to life as by a principle of central attraction, which extends its influence to the last moments of expiring nature. We see men still clinging to life, when they have lost all for which they appeared to live. A striking instance of this has been recently exhibited by that extraordinary individual,* who, rather than lose his life in the scenes of his renown, has exchanged the pinnacle of power and fame for the deepest degradation and obscurity. There are few qualities that command greater admiration than the superiority to the love of life and the dread of dissolution: as we admire things in proportion to their difficulty and rarity, we are astonished by that heroic bravery which can triumph over the first law of our nature. The Scriptures frequently recognize and appeal to this fundamental principle: thus, in apparent allusion to the text, our Saviour demands, "What shall a man give in exchange for his *soul*," or, as the word literally denotes, his *life?* The only promise annexed to any of the ten commandments, exhibits life as the chief earthly good, and its prolongation as the reward of filial piety: while, in the Proverbs, Wisdom is represented as having "length of days in her right hand; in her left, riches and honour."

II. I proceed to assign the reasons, or some of the reasons, for which this instinctive attachment to life is so deeply implanted in our nature.

1. The first and most obvious reason respects the preservation of life itself. That which, of all our possessions, is the most easily lost or injured, is that on the continuance of which all other things depend. The preservation of life requires incessant attention and exertion; the material requisite to feed the vital flame must be collected from innumerable sources, at great expense

* Buonaparte.

of time and trouble: the spark of life is perpetually exposed to the danger of extinction, like a lamp carried in a stormy night, that requires to be covered by the hand, and seems every moment ready to expire. Nothing but the strongest attachment to life could secure it, amidst continual exposures, from sudden or premature destruction: without the operation of the self-preserving instinct, man would be literally like a shadow, that is here to-day and gone to-morrow. On the first departure of prosperity, on the first preponderance of sorrow over joy, in this chequered scene,—in which the colours of good and evil are so constantly intermingled that it is often difficult to say which predominates over the other,—how many, unrestrained by the natural love of life, would forsake their stations; how few, unsupported by attachment to being, would persevere in their course to the end, or "run with patience the race set before them!" Our first father would probably have fulfilled, in the letter, the sentence he incurred, and died on the very day of his transgression, thus destroying the human race in their original, had it not been for the benevolent care of his Creator, by which his existence, and the desire of its continuance, were secured for the great purpose of his moral probation. For life, we cannot forget, is, in its highest use, the season of our trial for an eternal state of being. This is the point of view in which its preservation becomes unspeakably interesting. It stands connected with nothing less than the incarnation, suffering, and glory, of the Son of God; and, whatever is the importance of those stupendous mysteries, the same is the importance of human life, considered as the "time of our visitation!" The results of the whole process of redemption, the accomplishment of the greatest designs of the Deity, are involved in the continuance of this probationary state of existence.

2. A second purpose answered by the principle we are considering, is the promotion of industry and labour. Life must be loved, in order that it may be preserved; and preserved, in order that it may be employed. The original denunciation of death was preceded by the sen-

tence of a life of labour: "*Cursed is the ground for thy sake; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee: in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread, until thou return to the ground.*" In every other state of society, and perhaps in none so much as in the most refined state, the greater part of the community must necessarily be subjected to labour. Under the best possible form of government, some must produce what is to be enjoyed by others. This unavoidable condition of subjection and servitude will be attended, in many cases, by great hardship and suffering. In such circumstances, nothing but that strong attachment to life, of which we are speaking, could reconcile the weary sufferers to a voluntary continuance in a state that entails so much endurance. Yet, while every humane person must regard such instances of excessive toil with compassion, and desire to alleviate them so far as he may be able; this laborious condition of the multitude should be considered as a dispensation of mercy blended with judgement. For what would be the state of society, disturbed as even now it is by crimes, if the multitudes of those, who are at present confined by labour, were let loose upon the public in all the wantonness of a licentious imagination and unbridled passions? Reflect for a moment, what misery and desolation must arise from such a mass of depravity, such an accumulation of cupidity and malevolence, abandoned, without any fixed employment, to its own turbulent impulses! This, it must be acknowledged, is a melancholy picture of human nature; but it is such as truth requires. How great a benefit, therefore, that necessary condition of labour, which acts as a barrier of defence against the wildness of human passions, and says, as it were, to that tempestuous ocean, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther!" But the desire of preserving life is the strongest incentive to all this salutary industry and toil.

3. A third object to which the same principle is subservient, is the protection of life from the hand of violence. Without some strong restraining sentiment, the life of individuals would be exposed to continual danger

from the disordered passions of others. The first crime, of a social nature, committed by man, was the extinction of his brother's life; and the first penal law, enacted by God, was directed against a repetition of that crime: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." The love of life, so strongly felt in every bosom, inspires it with a proportionate horror of any act that would invade the life of another. Every one burns with indignation against an assassin, as against his own personal enemy; every one feels interested in the discovery of such a criminal, and would consider himself *honoured* in stepping forward to drag before the tribunal of justice one who is regarded as if he had injured every partaker of his nature! This universal horror, and exposure to the public vengeance, which peculiarly attaches to the crime of murder in all civilized states of society, cannot but operate as a powerful and important safeguard of human life. The magistrate and the law owe their whole protective efficacy to that sentiment of attachment to existence, which is a *law written on every heart.*

III. In adding a brief improvement of this subject, we may infer,

1. The fall of man; the universal apostacy of our nature from the state in which it originally proceeded from the Divine Author. Created with this inextinguishable desire of existence, we are destined to dissolution: our nature includes two contradictory principles; the certainty of death, and the attachment to life. This fact affords the clearest evidence that we are now placed in an unnatural, disordered, disjointed condition; that a great and awful change has passed upon our race since our first father came from the hand of God. And this change must be owing to *ourselves;* it cannot be ascribed to our *Creator*, without the supposition of a sufficient cause in our own misconduct. Here revelation breaks the silence of nature, while it tells us that *by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all, because all have sinned.* On any other hypothesis, the problem is inexplicable; for, can the

Father of the universe, himself the source of all created tenderness, be conceived to have thus treated his own offspring without a real and sufficient *cause*? Can malevolence and misery issue from the bosom of infinite goodness and love? Can He who gave us life, who bound us to it by so strong a tie of attachment, deprive us of it, and doom us to a corruption from which nature recoils, without a necessity arising from ourselves? Let any one that is a parent judge by his own parental feelings,—according to the appeal of our Saviour himself, founded upon this analogy. But the Scripture makes all clear: we are like the potter's vessel described by Jeremiah, which was at first made good, but was marred after it was made: "*How is the gold become dim! and the fine gold changed! The crown is fallen from our head; woe unto us, for we have sinned!*"

2. But the subject may serve to remind us, also, of the salvation which provided us the antidote, to our ruined condition. Every human being, it is true, is treated as a criminal, who, though he may be reprieved for a time, must expect to suffer the penalty of the law he has violated;—every individual, in his turn, is led forth to his destiny of death. This, however, is consistent with the plan of salvation. It is a *restorative* dispensation under which we are placed: we are not treated as innocent,—as if we had never offended,—but as criminals chastised for disobedience, while they are placed on trial for mercy. The deluge presented a grand monument of the divine wrath on sin; and a smaller exhibition of that wrath is repeated in the death of every human being. In such a situation, what we want is *life*; and this is abundantly offered. *Eternal life is the gift of God by Jesus Christ!* "*I*," said Jesus Christ, "*I am the life! I am the bread of life! Whosoever believeth in me shall live for ever!*" "*The life*," says John, "*was manifested: whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely!*" Such are some of the last accents of inspiration. As the value of a medicine is proportioned to the malignity of a disease,—how earnest should be our desire, how grateful our acceptance, of such a remedy! To pass from death

to life; to triumph in the prospect and approach of the last enemy; to enjoy even here many a delightful foretaste of the heavenly immortality; to experience a vital union with the Father of spirits, and hereafter to attain the consummation of this union, and bask for ever in the brightness of His presence;—*behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us! How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?* Such neglect involves a degree of guilt and infatuation which it will require eternity to deplore, and eternity to comprehend!

3. As a third improvement, connected with what has been observed, let me remind you of the *medium* by which this divine life is imparted and received. There must be a medium of contact between the benefit and the subject of that benefit; between the eternal life provided, and the Spirit for which it is provided. This connecting medium is faith. *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ.* Faith is the link of union between the salvation as prepared and perfect *without* ourselves, and our own personal being. This is beautifully, though briefly, expressed by Peter, when he assures the cripple whom he had healed, that the cure had been effected through the medium of *faith*: "*His name, through faith in His name, hath made this man whole.*" *Faith* was as necessary in the subject of the cure, as the *name* itself on which his faith relied. The work of the Spirt of Christ on the heart, is as necessary to our salvation as the work of Christ himself,—his obedience unto death, and his intercession in heaven.

4. In the last place, the subject concurs with the occasion to remind us of the duty, the obligation under which we lie, to impart the knowledge and enjoyment of these vital, eternal blessings, to our suffering fellow-sinners. The civil, and merely temporal benefits of christianity, are great: the water of life, in its passage through a country, diffuses innumerable improvements wherever it pursues its peaceful course;—the very *leaves of the tree of life* are given *for the healing of the nations.* But far be it from us to recommend the civil as the *great*

and *ultimate* blessings of the gospel; these are of a *spiritual* and *eternal* nature; furnishing a perfect antidote to the dread of death—a perfect satisfaction for the desire of life, so deeply implanted in the human breast.

XIII.

NOTES OF THE FOLLOWING SERMON,

TRANSCRIBED FROM THE MANUSCRIPT OF MR. HALL.

"*Behold the Lamb of God.*"

I. The import of this appellation.

1. The peculiar features of His personal character.
2. The design of His death.

1. His personal character. His innocence. His patience. "Such a High-Priest became us, &c."

2. He was the Paschal Lamb. Exod. xii.

Draw the parallel in several particulars. Both sacrifices the instrument of effecting a great deliverance. The benefit of both, moral, not physical. The lamb must be perfect, offered by and for all the people. Blood sprinkled. Not a bone broken. Time of offering.

II. The purport of the exclamation,—that He is an object of attention. Its most proper object. Three qualities entitled to attention.

1. Intrinsic greatness. An incarnate Deity, the Ruler of all things, the mysterious Mediator and Advocate.

2. Newness. What so new as the invisible Creator clothed in human flesh—The Ancient of Days cradled as an infant;—He who upholdeth all things sinking under a weight of suffering;—The Lord of glory expiring on the cross;—the Light of the world sustaining an awful eclipse;—the Sun of Righteousness immerged in the shadow of death?

3. The relation an object bears to our interest. The Lamb of God a most interesting object to all classes of men: (1.) To sinners: (2.) To saints.*

MR. GRINFIELD'S ANALYSIS OF THE SERMON,

AS REPRESENTED IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

I. Import of the appellation, "Lamb of God."

1. Features of the personal character of Christ: (1.) Innocence; (2.) Patience.

2. Design of his appearance.

Points of resemblance between His sacrifice and the Passover. In each, (1.) A great deliverance achieved; (2.) A destruction, otherwise inevitable, averted; (3.) The benefit moral, not physical; (4.) The personal qualities of the victims similar; (5.) The blood required to be sprinkled; (6.) The sacrifice to be regarded by the whole congregation; (7.) The time of the offering the same; (8.) No bone to be broken; (9.) The passover prepared by fire, as an emblem of torture.

II. Design of the exclamation, "Behold!"

An object worthy of supreme attention from all;

1. From sinners. Three qualities which command attention, exhibited here in the highest degrees: (1.) *Greatness;* (2.) *Novelty;* (3.) *Usefulness.*

2. From believers.

3. From the redeemed in glory.

4. From the holy angels.

5. From the Divine Being.

* These notes give the plan of the sermon as it was preached at Bedford: at Bristol the application of the text was extended, as the following sketch represents, to *all* orders of beings.

THE LAMB OF GOD — HIS CHARACTER—HIS SACRIFICE — AND HIS CLAIM TO UNIVERSAL ATTENTION.

[PREACHED AT BROADMEAD, BRISTOL, NOVEMBER, 1820, AND AGAIN AT BEDFORD, MARCH, 1821.]

JOHN i. 35, 36.—*Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!**

THE forerunner of our Lord manifested a peculiar anxiety to impress the minds of his hearers with a conviction that he was not himself the *Messiah.* Yet there appears to have existed a party among his disciples, who entertained an improper attachment to his ministry, preferring it to that of our Lord. Their disciples constituted two distinct classes; the partisans of John, disposed to exalt his pretensions greatly beyond their real nature and his own assertions, seem to have countenanced the opinion that he was the great expected personage. To counteract such a fatal misconception, the Baptist embraced every opportunity of referring his followers to Jesus Christ, as well as of explaining his own character. He was, as he represented, "the voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord;" he was "the friend of the Bridegroom," not the Bridegroom himself; and, with the same view, he uttered, on two occasions, the declaration contained in the passage just read. The testimony there expressed is not the first which he had borne to Christ: it appears that on the preceding day he had announced Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world:" and, as the evangelist relates, in the text, "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, *Behold the Lamb of God!*"

While we admire the disinterestedness of this great man in endeavouring to convince his converts that Jesus Christ was infinitely his superior, we cannot help sup-

* The present transcript is the result of the notes taken by the Rev T. Grinfield, at Bristol, col ated with the notes taken at Bedford.

posing that, probably, his ministry and his life were the sooner closed, in consequence of the inordinate attachment of his adherents. It was unfit that he should remain as a rival to the Saviour: he was therefore withdrawn from the scene, and his ministry prematurely closed, that every degree of confidence for salvation might be removed from the creature, to be fixed on the *Saviour* alone.

In considering the testimony borne to Jesus Christ in the text, I shall direct your attention, first, to the *import of the appellation;* and then to the *purport of the exclamation*, as it may be understood to express the *claim which Jesus Christ possesses to the attention of every order of beings.*

I. The *import of the appellation*, "the Lamb of God." There are *two* things which, in all probability, John had in his view when he used this appellation: the distinguishing features of our Saviour's *personal character*, and the great *design of his appearance and death.*

1. In the first place, the expression, "Lamb of God," has respect to the *peculiar features*, the *personal character of Christ.*

In the Scriptures, as perhaps in every known language of mankind, a *lamb* has been selected as the popular symbol of *innocence* and *patience.* These were qualities that peculiarly distinguished our Saviour, and formed, on every occasion, the most conspicuous features of his character.

(1.) He was a perfect pattern of *innocence.* As one of his apostles describes him, "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." His freedom from every taint of original sin was secured by his miraculous conception: hence the angel at his nativity declared to the Virgin Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee; and, therefore, that *holy* thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the *Son of God.*" As he advanced in age, all his actions were completely consonant with the law of God. He could say to his bitterest enemies, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" He could affirm that, when Satan came, he had nothing in Christ.

Even the opponents of christianity have never attempted to impugn the moral character of its Author. It was *necessary* that "the Lamb of God" should be "without spot or blemish." "Such a High-priest *became* us;" because, as an *example*, he could not have been explicitly proposed to our imitation, had the slightest imperfection attached to himself; and, as a *sacrifice* for sin, he could not have been acceptable in the eye of infinite purity and justice, had he been any other than a spotless victim. Accordingly his conduct was, in every particular, blameless and virtuous. In the most trying situations, under every form of temptation, we find him never-failing: there appears nothing in his character in the *smallest* degree inconsistent with the idea of absolute human perfection. The greatest absence of every thing like malevolence,—of every thing merely selfish,—appears in all his actions: His miracles were always miracles of *mercy and beneficence;* his omnipotence was exerted only to do good: it seemed as if the secret of his power resided only in benefiting others, and relieving the miseries of those who surrounded him; as if he existed only for them, and became the most helpless of beings when his own interest was concerned. Innocence is a negative term, it properly denotes only the absence of faults and offences; in this respect it formed but a *part* of his character. *His* innocence was crowned with infinite *beneficence.*

(2.) A second, and an equally distinguished feature of his character, implied in the appellation of a *lamb*,—is his *patience.* "The Son of man," as he said of himself "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to *give his life a ransom* for many." He bowed to the will of his Father, and was "*obedient* unto death, even the death of the cross." In the midst of injuries and insults, the most unmerited and aggravated that were ever suffered, he exhibited a perfect pattern of patient resignation. He never resented the violence of his enemies: "When he was reviled, he reviled not again." "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

There was indeed *one* instance in which "he opened his mouth;"—arraigned before the high-priest, he answered not a word; until, in reply to the demand whether he was the Son of God, he answered in the affirmative; thus breaking silence before his enemies *only* when his confession insured his condemnation to death. The miraculous powers he possessed over nature and the minds of men, he never exerted to avert his own sufferings, or avenge his wrongs upon his persecutors. Though the elements were at his disposal, and demons subject to his commands, yet, in the crisis of his affliction, nothing was visible but compassion for the guilty: "Father," he cried, "forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Nor would he suffer his disciples to retaliate the injuries he received: he rebuked Peter when he drew the sword on Malchus; he rebuked his disciples when they would have called down fire on the Samaritans, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Gentleness and tenderness, a sensibility to the sufferings of others, and an indifference to his own,—these formed the most prominent traits of his character; in *these* he places the *essence* of his religion, so far as it is practical and relative to others. Of other virtues, we may say that they form parts of the christian character; but these are emphatically the christian spirit itself; in proportion as we are patient, compassionate, forbearing, forgiving, and ready even to *suffer* for the good of others, we *have* "the mind of Christ."

It was thus that he illustrated, in his own example, the nature and genius of the gospel dispensation, as superior to every other. None of his predecessors in the church of God could compare with himself here. The *law* was a *severe* dispensation; its tendency was not so much to cherish the milder virtues, the lamb-like graces of the gospel. Moses, though "the meekest of men" under that economy, was overtaken by the impetuosity of his spirit when he dashed in pieces the tables inscribed by the finger of God. The miracles of Elijah and Elisha were sometimes destructive: the former commanded fire from heaven, the latter bears from the wood, to con-

sume his enemies. John the Baptist was austere in his manners, and terrific in his preaching: there was in him much *moral grandeur*, but it was of a savage and uncultivated aspect; it resembled the lonely and severe character of the wilderness in which he appeared: he was "the axe laid to the root of the trees;" the son of thunder, commissioned to summon the guilty before the tribunal, and denounce judgement on every unfruitful professor. But Jesus Christ was mild, affable, social, compassionate; "the friend of publicans and sinners;" who came to "feed his flock like a shepherd, to gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom." When he beheld the city of Jerusalem, he wept over it; when he said to all who heard him "Learn of me," he could truly and peculiarly add, as at once an example and encouragement to his disciples, "for I am meek and lowly in heart." So well might he be styled, with a view to the features of his character, "the Lamb of God."

2. But we shall form a very inadequate idea of the full import of John's expression, if we confine it to the *example* of Jesus Christ. This is not the only, nor perhaps the principal view, in which we are to understand the appellation, "Lamb of God!" There is another object of the highest importance to us, and to which his innocence and patience were requisite. He appeared not merely as a pattern of holiness; though, in this respect, we have seen in him an unrivalled preeminence above all the messengers of God; but he is to be principally regarded as the *Saviour*, "who taketh," or *beareth*, "away the sin of the world." That the Baptist, in calling Jesus Christ "the Lamb of God," had a reference to his *sacrificial* character, is manifest from the explanatory clause he added on the preceding occasion—"who taketh away the sin of the world." The *example* of Christ, however perfect, had no proper power to "take away sin:" the best example, as we know, has but a feeble influence in correcting depravity, and none whatever in removing guilt. It is unnecessary, however, to multiply words in proof of this doctrine; because it is our privilege, on the

present occasion, to address those who are continually reminded of Christ as the only mediator between God and man. In the appellation employed by the Baptist there is then, secondly, a distinct reference to the *great design of his appearance and death.* It points him out as the Lamb which God provided and accepted. It marks the *sacrificial* character of Christ, prefigured by the legal offerings. This Divine Lamb fulfilled all that was signified by those ancient sacrifices, which consisted principally of lambs; and especially all that was represented by the paschal lamb. A lamb was offered daily, in the morning and evening, in the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple: but the paschal sacrifice was solemnized with a peculiar attention and publicity once in every year. The Jews regarded this as the most important of all their observances. It was the most ancient of them all, instituted on their departure from Egypt, in commemoration of their deliverance from the destroying angel: and though at first it reminded them of that event, yet, afterwards, it probably served to direct their expectations to the great sacrifice for sin by the promised Redeemer. The circumstances and the purport of this remarkable ceremony may be found fully described in the twelfth chapter of Exodus; a chapter replete with the doctrine of Christ crucified. On that memorable night, in which the angel of the Lord slew all the first-born of Egypt, not excepting those of the royal household, he was ordered to spare the families of Israel, which had been directed to exhibit a sign of the redemption by Jesus Christ, by sprinkling the blood of a lamb on the posts of their doors. The destroying angel recognized this consecrated token, and *passed over* the house thus marked, without smiting any member of the family it contained. That this was typical of the salvation by Jesus Christ, is evident from the application of it made by the apostle Paul, when he says, "Christ, *our* passover, is sacrificed for us; *therefore* let us keep the feast." The idea of Christ being the great end of that ceremony is so plain, so certain, that the apostle takes no pains, as he does on many other

occasions, to establish the point by reasoning; he simply assumes and asserts it as a well-known truth.

Many particulars may be pointed out in the resemblance between the paschal sacrifice and "the Lamb of God:" I proceed to trace the parallel through some of the most remarkable.

(1.) The passover was designed to *commemorate* a great deliverance, that of Israel from the captivity and slavery of Egypt; and it was designed to *prefigure* a deliverance far greater—that of mankind from a tyranny far more abominable, a depression far more miserable; from the captivity of Satan, the slavery of sin, the dread of wrath to come; that the happy subjects of this divine redemption may be placed under the conduct of providence and grace in their passage through the wilderness of this world, until they shall be settled in the land of promise and eternal rest.

(2.) The passover commemorated a deliverance from a destruction otherwise *inevitable;* it was the only appointed means of safety; there was no other possibility of escape from the angel of divine wrath. Thus the redemption which is in Christ Jesus is the only refuge of hope set before us,—the only appointed means of escape from that wrath which will come upon all that neglect this great salvation.

(3.) In *both* these cases (it deserves attention) there exists no *natural* relation between the *means* and the *end:* the benefit of the sacrifice is *moral, not physical.* The sprinkling of the blood on the doors of the Israelites had no intrinsic efficacy whatever to preserve them: none can suppose any such efficacy therein, as that by which causes produce their effects in the course of nature. The Divine Being *appointed* the blood to be the sign and the instrument of the deliverance; and, being thus appointed, it served to arrest the progress of the destroying angel. So it is with the sacrifice of Christ. Between the death of Christ and the expiation of guilt, there was no such relation as that which subsists in nature between secondary causes and their appropriate

effects: it was a *moral* relation, resulting from the will and appointment of God, who accepted the death of Christ as a consideration of sufficient dignity to satisfy his justice and vindicate his law. It had no efficacy as a *natural* cause; on the contrary, it left all *natural* causes to operate as before: but it became a *moral* motive with God; an authentic instrument for the sanctification and acceptance of those who are "elect, according to the foreknowledge of God, unto obedience, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus." It was a powerful cause in and upon the divine mind, moving Him who moves all things. For the sake of *this* great sacrifice it seemed fit and right, and, in every respect, worthy of Him, "*by* whom and *for* whom are all things," that every penitent believer should be treated as if he had never sinned; that, through *this*, he should be washed, justified, sanctified, and glorified. And there was no more a change of the divine mind in the latter than in the former instance; since the Deity foresaw all that should come to pass. At a distance He contemplated the sacrifice of Christ: He beheld in it the honour of the divine law, the display of the divine purity and justice. This sacrifice, being always present to his contemplation, was the ground on which sins, committed under the first covenant, were pardoned to the penitent; and it is with a reference to the efficacy of this expiation, as reflected back from the cross, that Christ is called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

(4.) Again, we may observe the similarity which appears in the *personal qualities* of the two victims. The paschal lamb must be perfect, a male of the first year, without spot or blemish. So Christ, as we have seen, possessed all *moral* perfection; exhibited every virtue, without a single fault or defect. He possessed also, the *physical* perfection of man: he was slain, not when withered by age or decayed by sickness, but "in the flower of his strength, while his breasts were full of milk, and his bones of marrow," — when youth was vanishing into mature manhood.

(5.) Observe, further, the slaying of the paschal lamb did not avail, unless its *blood* were *sprinkled.* The blood was shed in order that it might be sprinkled; the sprinkling was necessary to preserve the Israelites. Neither will the blood of Jesus Christ, my brethren, prove of saving efficacy, unless it be *applied.* When wrath shall overwhelm the unbelieving, in the judgement of the last day, it will be of no avail to plead the merit of this great sacrifice, unless we have approached it ourselves. "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the *blood* of Jesus, we must draw near with a heart sprinkled from an evil (or an accusing) conscience." None will be saved from the destruction of that day, though they may have lived in the midst of christian privileges, who cannot say with the apostle—"We are come to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel." The merit of the Redeemer's blood is infinite, but its efficacy is confined to its application. In his own words, "except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, ye have no life in you." The apostles unite the *name* of Christ with *faith* in his name, as the means they had employed in healing the cripple at the gate of the temple: "His name, through *faith* in his name, hath made this man whole; yea, the *faith* which is by him hath given this man this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."

(6.) As another particular of the parallel, it may be remarked that, while many of the legal sacrifices were offered *by individuals* in their private or public characters, the paschal lamb was required to be slain and offered *by the whole congregation of Israel;* it being understood by all, that he who neglected this important sacrifice would lose its benefit,—would be cut off from the congregation. "Behold," here, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the *world!*"—The blood of animal victims streamed for ages on the Jewish altars, but did not take away sin, even from the Jews themselves: the benefit to be derived from those offerings was chiefly derived by those who looked *beyond* them. Except as shadows of the true Sacrifice for sin, they were to be

considered merely as civil rites. The voice with which they spoke, could not, in general, be heard "within the veil." The greater part of the Jews were worshippers of the outer court, and rested in their sacrifices as means of external and civil advantages. But, in "the Lamb of God," proclaimed by John, we behold an oblation sufficient for the whole world; a fountain opened for sin, and flowing in all directions; an element of pardon and eternal life, free and extensive as the atmosphere we breathe, which encompasses every portion of the earth's surface. "*He*," says the apostle, "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for *ours* only, but also for the sins of the *whole* world:" "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin."

(7.) In the next place, the *time of slaying the paschal lamb* agreed with the time of our Saviour's sacrifice. The sufferings of Christ took place at the feast of the passover; and the very hour of the day appears to have corresponded with that at which the paschal lamb was slain. In the chapter of Exodus before referred to, it is required that the lamb should be killed *in the evening;* or, (as the original signifies, and as it is rendered in the margin of our version,) *between the two evenings;* that is, between the chronological evening and the natural: the one commencing immediately after the sun had passed the meridian, or after twelve at noon; the other by computation of time, being at six o'clock. Thus the middle hour *between the two evenings* will be at three in the afternoon; the point of time at which our Lord expired on the cross. He was fastened to it "at the sixth hour," which answers to our noon; and, "about the ninth hour," or three in the afternoon, "He cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost." Thus, at the moment when the paschal lamb was appointed to be slain, did "the Lamb of God" expire, under the stroke of the divine justice.

(8.) Great objects consecrate all that surrounds them: they impart a portion of their own grandeur to every thing they touch, to every circumstance with which they are connected. It was required that "*not a bone of the paschal lamb should be broken;*" it must be sacrificed

entire: and this was ordered, that it might the more exactly represent the great Sacrifice. When Christ was crucified, the soldiers (as you remember) finding him already dead, forbore to break his legs, as, according to the custom, they had broken the legs of his two fellow-sufferers; and thus, as the historian observes, was fulfilled that which had been written: "a bone of him shall not be broken." This circumstance, though in itself minute, serves to show that Jesus Christ, as our Sacrifice, was equally the subject of the prediction, and the substance of the type.

(9.) Finally, the pashal lamb was permitted to be prepared as food, by no other means than *fire*. What could more appropriately prefigure the agonies of "the Lamb of God,"—who sweat great drops of blood in the garden; —who was parched with thirst on the cross:—who, having submitted himself to endure the indignant justice of the Governor of the universe, experienced the awful truth, that "our God is a consuming fire:" when "His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death;" and when, in the climax of his anguish, he exclaimed, "Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He contended, in those moments, with all the storms and billows of the divine wrath; he tasted the penalties of eternal death.

It appears, then, that there was in many particulars a striking resemblance between Jesus Christ and the paschal sacrifice: and the great beauty of the passover arises from this resemblance. How strangely, therefore, are *they* mistaken, who confine their view of ' the Lamb of God" to his *example*, and deny the sacrificial and atoning nature of his sufferings. We might ask such persons *why* was even inanimate nature as it were in convulsions at his death? *Why* did the heavens put on sackcloth, and the sun hide his face in darkness? Why were the rocks rent, and the earth shaken? Or (if this be considered as merely impassioned declamation,) we may demand—*Why* do we meet with such constant and emphatic expressions regarding the blood, the cross, the

sacrifice, the death of Jesus Christ? Why should there have been so vast a preparation of legal sacrifices, of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, expressly compared by the apostle (especially in his epistle to the Hebrews) with the death of Jesus Christ?—Why all this, if nothing more was meant by his death, than the completion of his *example*, the *sealing of the truths he taught* with the blood he shed. Supposing *this* to be all that was intended to be understood by such representations, we can only say that the gospel would be the greatest imposition on common sense that ever was presented to the world; it would combine the most pompous pretensions with the most meagre reality, of all existing compositions.

II. We proceed to consider, as the second part of the subject, *the spirit and design of the exclamation* uttered by the Baptist in the text, as it may be understood to express *the claim which Jesus Christ possesses to attention from beings of every order: all* are interested in complying with the summons given in those words, "Behold the Lamb of God."

It appears that the Baptist did not principally mean, by this exclamation, to direct the *eyes* of his disciples to the person of Jesus Christ as a *visible* object;—in *that* sense, none could comply with the call, except the few who were present in the scenes of his transient ministry: the Baptist desired to command the *attention* of his hearers to the *character and office* of "the Lamb of God." In this sense it is that the term "Behold!" is frequently used in the Scriptures, where no literal vision of the object is intended: it is used to denote that the object *thus* introduced, is deserving of *attention:* as when the angel says, "*Behold*, I bring you good tidings of great joy!" or, when the apostle exclaims, "*Behold* what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" In the text the meaning is similar to that of the definite pronoun, as though John had said, "*This* is the Lamb of God:" just as, on another occasion, he said, "*This* is he of whom I spake." The purport of the exclamation, therefore, is, that Jesus Christ, as "the Lamb

of God," deserves universal attention; that he is the greatest object of admiring regard, which the universe presents. In illustrating the spirit of the exclamation thus understood, we observe the claim which "the Lamb of God" possesses on the attention of *all mankind.* Mankind are comprehended in two distinct classes,—they are either sinners who remain in their original character; or they are believers, who, though not ceasing from sin altogether, are yet delivered from its dominion. *Here* is an object preeminently worthy the attention of *both* these classes:—

1. And, in the first place, of *all who remain, as sinners, in their original character and state.* In every possible view in which an object can deserve regard, "the Lamb of God" claims from all such persons the most earnest attention.

There are three qualities which entitle an object to our regard.

(1.) The first is its own *intrinsic greatness.* On this account the sun, the moon, and the stars, those illustrious splendours of the firmament, have attracted the attention of mankind in every age and nation. But the wonders of the *material* world are merely subordinate to those of the *intelligent and moral universe;* and *here* an object is exhibited, incomparably greater, in the scale of being, than the celestial luminaries. Here we may behold Deity incarnate; God manifested in human nature! Turn aside, and see this great sight; contemplate this object with fixed attention, till your heart is suitably affected by the contemplation; gaze with the eye of faith on this brighter "Morning Star," gaze on this nobler "Sun of Righteousness," till every sublunary object is eclipsed by its superior splendour. Never was Deity revealed in our nature, but in the person of Jesus Christ. He alone could be truly called "Emmanuel, God with us." "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;"—a fulness that deserves the most earnest and persevering research, while it must for ever baffle finite comprehension. *This* is "the great mystery of godliness;" the study of admiring angels; the masterpiece of

the manifold wisdom of God; the wonder of the universe.

(2.) A second quality in an object, that excites our attention, and raises it to surprise and astonishment, is *novelty*. We esteem a thing the more for being *new*: there is a vivifying influence in the *freshest and rarest* appearances of nature or of mind. But, where will you find another object, worthy to be compared in *novelty*, in entire *originalty*, in *singularity* combined with greatness, with the object here presented, "the Lamb of God?" Travel in idea through creation,—climb the loftiest heights,—descend to the lowest depths,—take the wings of an angel, and fly to distant worlds: no such Being will be found as He who once tabernacled in the flesh—"the Lamb that was slain," and that is now seated at the right hand of God, as "the Lamb in the midst of the throne." Heaven, and the heaven of heavens could not contain him; yet he dwelt, to all appearance, in the body of an infant;—the invsible Creator clothed in human form,—the Ancient of Days cradled as an infant of days,—"He who upholdeth all things sinking under a weight of suffering,—the Lord of life, the Lord of glory, expiring on a cross,—the Light of the world sustaining an awful eclipse,—the Sun of Righteousness immerged in the shadow of death!" Never before was there such a spectacle in earth or heaven. Even inanimate nature seemed to sympathize with his last agonies; heaven itself descended to "behold the Lamb of God:" and well it might; for there was *then* a *greater* prodigy on earth than any which heaven contained. Well might angels "desire to look into the mysteries of man's redemption; and nothing but the most astonishing infatuation can prevent us from following such an example. Mankind are accustomed to admire profound philosophers, victorious heroes, or celebrated poets: but what are all such objects of admiration, in comparison with this unparalleled phenomenon, which exhibits all the attributes of Deity, adapted to human apprehensions?

(3.) Once more: objects arrest our attention, that *bear a relation to our interest.* Men are interested by

that which involves their security from evil, or promises their advancement in prosperity. Objects which are *great* command attention; those which are *new* excite curiosity; but if, in addition to its *greatness* and its *novelty*, an object bears a manifest *relation to our most* important *interests*,—if it involves our defence and safety, —if it forms the pillar of our support,—if it supplies the shield of the soul, the only hope for the guilty, the only comfort for the dying, the only prospect of eternal happiness,—surely, my dear brethren, *such* an object is calculated to awaken in our hearts the most lively affections and desires;—and *such* an object is "the Lamb of God." Not only great and wonderful in *himself*, he bears an essential relation to our most important—to our *eternal* interests. He comes to deliver us from misery, and promote us to happiness. He is competent to satisfy all the secret wants and desires of our nature. "Come unto me," he says, "all ye that are weary; and I will give you rest. I am the Bread of Life: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever; I will raise him up at the last day." These are some of *His* words: from whom beside will you hear words like these—"*the words of eternal life?*"

Jesus Christ came to save that which was lost: he laid down his life to accomplish our salvation. Nor was there any *waste* of life in that sacrifice: every portion of his infinite energy was requisite to the attainment of such an object; nothing less than the power that upholds all things was adequate to sustain the weight of human sin. He whose almighty influence diffuses itself through the heavens and earth, and preserves all orders of being, He alone endured our punishment; He, "trod the winepress alone:" He "looked, and there was none to deliver:" there existed *no other* way of salvation than that which he has opened. *The justice of the Deity, not to be propitiated by any other means, pursues the transgressor on earth and in hell; nothing in the universe can arrest it in its awful career, until it stops in reverence at the cross of Christ!*

As our salvation from the effects of sin is a deliver-

ance from a far worse than Egyptian captivity and misery, so its accomplishment required a far greater exertion of Deity than was required to arrest the billows of the Red Sea. Never did "the mighty God" more fully display the greatness of his power, than when he showed himself "mighty to *save*, even to the uttermost." He fixed the foundation on which we may build our hope of immortality, and find it to be "a hope that maketh not ashamed," founded on the Rock of Ages. He went into the shadow of death, into "the lowest parts of the earth," that he might lay *deep* the *basis of that edifice which was to rise as high as the throne of God!* "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree," that we might become partakers of his own divine nature. This, my brethren, is a view of "the Lamb of God," of the last importance to be taken by us all. If you see him not in this character, you see *nothing* to any valuable purpose. You have taken hold of *nothing*, you have grasped only *shadows*, if you have not taken hold of "*Christ*, your *Life*." Flee to him; cleave to him: say of him in the sincerity of your heart, "This is all my salvation and all my desire."

There is only *one* class of beings by whom the object presented in the text is treated with unconcern; for even the legions of hell regard it with a fearful interest:—utterly to "neglect so great salvation" is the peculiar malady of impenitent sinners in the present world. But what infatuation can be compared with this? If there be any *other* door by which you may hope to enter into heaven, avail yourselves of that "door of hope" without delay. If any *other* name be given under heaven in which you may safely trust for the salvation of your soul, place your trust in that favourite name, and leave this Saviour to others; but if there exists *no other* door that can admit us into heaven than that which *He* has opened who says, "I am the door, I am the way, the truth, and the life,"—if *no other* name has been given under heaven whereby we may be saved than the name of Jesus Christ, —if *this* is the *only* dispensation of mercy; then let us turn our regards from every other refuge, and fix them on

this alone "Let all the house of Israel," let all the world, "know assuredly that this Jesus, who was crucified is both Lord and Christ; and they who believe in him are justified from all things." In the land of Israel there were *several* cities of refuge, and the criminal might flee to that which was nearest: but there exists only one for *us;* one "hope set before us, to which we must flee for refuge;" one "Man who is a covert from the storm, a shadow from the heat." In "the Lamb of God" you may obtain present peace; beholding Him, you may die with tranquillity and joy; and rise through Him, to the mansions of eternal glory. Behold, therefore, ye sinners, ready to perish, "behold the Lamb of God."

How is it possible that *those* can escape "who neglect this great salvation, which at first was spoken by the *Lord*, *God* himself bearing witness with signs and wonders, the gifts of his own Spirit? *Not* to behold *such* an object, is "to have eyes, and not to see:" *not* to attend to *such* a call, is "to have ears, and not to hear!" Better *not* to have eyes, and see; better *not* to have ears and hear; better *not* to have an understanding, a heart, a sentient nature capable of thought and feeling; better to be numbered with the brutes, or to be a mere plant, or stone, than not to believe this divine report,—than to remain one to whom this "arm of the Lord" is not revealed,—than to see in Christ "no beauty that you should desire him," to regard him "as a root in a dry ground," instead of discerning in such a Saviour, "the *power of God, the wisdom of God!*"

2. But there is a second class of persons among mankind—*those who have repented and believed:* "the Lamb of God" has an equal claim to the continued and earnest regard of his believing followers.

Some benefits we receive in such a manner that any farther attention to their cause is unnecessary; no motive but gratitude requires us to think of them again: they are complete, whether or not we recur to their origin. This is not the case with the benefits conferred by Jesus Christ. Beside the claim of *gratitude*, which ought to outlast the immediate operation of benefits received,—

(for we should think it unnatural in a son to forget his parents as soon as they were in the grave,) *here* we are dependent on our Benefactor, for a *continuity* of blessings. It is not enough to have regarded him at first as the only Source of pardon and salvation: he is as necessary to us from day to day as when we *first* believed in him. He is not a Saviour whom we may forget, having once for all received his benefits: he is the Source of continual energy through the whole of our career. The Bread of life can no more be dispensed with in the *spiritual* life than in the *natural:* in respect to the one as well as to the other, we must say, "Give us this day our daily," or, as the original word signifies, our *essential* "bread!" "Lord, evermore give us this bread!" We must apply for perpetual repetitions of our Saviour's pardoning grace, and justifying merit, corresponding with our perpetual transgressions and deficiencies. The spiritual life of a christian can only be maintained in its vigour by a ceaseless emanation from Jesus Christ. "The life which I *now* live," says the apostle Paul, "I live by the faith of the Son of God: it is not I that live, but Christ liveth in me." In other words, he was continually "beholding the Lamb of God." Every christian partakes of his experience, and to the end of his life feels the same need of Christ,—of his example, his doctrine, and especially of his atonement,—which he felt at first, when he fled alarmed and distressed to the foot of the cross. When the rock was smitten in Horeb, the water continued to flow through the wilderness for the constant supply of the Israelites; and they drank of that water daily until they reached the promised Canaan. "That rock was Christ;" and thus we must daily drink of the spiritual streams that flow from Him. We must look unto Him, and we shall then be *lightened, and our faces not ashamed.* When our Saviour, in his great condescension and humility, washed the feet of his disciples, Peter at first refused, saying, "Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet." On this, our Saviour replied, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me." "Lord," said Peter, "not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." This our Lord

declined, observing, "He that is washed, needeth not save to wash his *feet;* and now ye are clean." This implies, in the spiritual application which it was probably designed to receive, that, after having bathed at our first repentance in the fountain of that blood which "cleanseth from all sin," we must still repair to the same for constant purification from those innumerable defilements which, by our frailty, we cannot but contract in our walk through the present world. Even the clean require to be again and again purified. The sins of a single day would be sufficient to condemn us: weighed in the balance, we should be found wanting. The believer never subsists on an independent source of his own—he lives by *faith:* faith is not the reservoir, but the habitual receiver. He is continually directing his eye toward *Him* in whom it has pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, and that out of that fulness we all should receive even grace for grace; grace in the streams, corresponding with grace in the fountain. Let us live more by faith in Christ; "the just shall live by faith;" it is the safest and the happiest life. On every occasion of infirmity and distress, let us renew our application to that Saviour who said, in answer to the complaint of his apostle, "My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is perfect in thy weakness." "Most gladly, therefore," adds the encouraged apostle, "will I glory even in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The moment we forget our dependence on Christ, and are puffed up with a conceit of our own merit or strength, we are in danger of falling into the snares of Satan.

3. Having dwelt the longer on the more direct and obvious application of the doctrine taught by John the Baptist in the text, to the two classes of mankind, as either impenitent sinners, or justified believers, we may *extend* the exclamation, in the third place, to the *redeemed in the world of glory.* From *them*, no less than from their brethren on earth, "the Lamb of God" claims the highest degree of admiring regard. He retains this appellation as we learn from the last book of Scripture, in his present exalted state; and it is remarkable that the name

which expresses his humiliation to the death of the cross is selected as the name under which he is adored in the world of glory: "I beheld," says John, "and lo, a multitude, which no man could number, gathered from all nations, stood before the throne and before the *Lamb*: and they cried, with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God and to the Lamb! Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the *Lamb*, for ever and ever!" It is strange that any should be found, who, calling themselves christians, refuse to pay Jesus Christ that worship here on *earth*, which he is represented in these passages as receiving in *heaven!* Such persons, if they are admitted into heaven, will have indeed to learn a *new song*, for they must learn a *new religion!* But *you*, my dear brethren, "have not *so* learned Christ:" you know that the Redeemer holds the most distinguished place in the world of glory; he sits at the right hand of God; he is the centre of the glory that shall be revealed; his presence constitutes to the redeemed the principal charm of heaven. It was his own desire "that those whom the Father had given him may *be with him where he is*, and may there *behold his glory*." It is only in him that the Deity is visible: "No man hath seen God, nor can see; he dwells in light which no man can approach; the only-begotten Son has declared him." Deity requires to be shaded and softened, by putting on the veil of our nature, before it can be suited to our feeble perception; the glory of the Lord must shine in the face of Jesus Christ. We read concerning the redeemed inhabitants of heaven, that they hunger no more, nor thirst any more; because the *Lamb*, who is in the midst of the throne, feeds them with the bread of life, and leads them to fountains of living water; a description which implies that Jesus Christ is himself the source of celestial beatitude.

4. But, in the fourth place, there is yet another order of beings to whom "the Lamb of God" presents an object of peculiar attention and profound admiration. *The holy angels*,—that innumerable company of spirits who

"excel in strength,"—are represented as deeply interested in the service and glory of the Redeemer. From its infancy, they watched with anxiety the fortunes of the rising church. They announced the birth of Christ with exulting strains: they ministered to Christ in the scenes of his temptation, his agony, and his burial; they cheered his apostles with the first tidings of his resurrection. "He is not here, he is risen." Even after his ascension they still lingered with a compassionate concern among his sorrowing disciples, and assured them of his final return: "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus shall come again, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." And in that day of his final return, "when the Son of Man shall come in his glory," there shall be "all the holy angels with him." Accordingly, among the glories which accompany the manifestation of God in the flesh, the apostle enumerates this,—that "He was *seen of angels*:" and he represents the Father as introducing the Son into the world with this proclamation, "Let all the angels of God worship him." It is not improbable that those glorious beings are themselves, in some respect, involved in the blessings of that stupendous plan, by which "things in heaven" are gathered together in one centre with "things on earth." Angels may probably be *secured* in that felicity, to which saints are *promoted*, by the mediation of Jesus Christ: and certainly the former are described as taking part with the latter in the songs of praise to *the Lamb.* "I heard," says John, "the voice of many angels round about the throne, and their number was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

5. Finally, there is a Being of another order, a Being infinitely exalted above any of those already mentioned, whose attention is deeply engaged by the object presented in the text:—*God himself* is concerned, supremely concerned, in the contemplation of "the Lamb of God." To *Him* the redeemer is an object, not indeed of *admiration*, since the Divine Being can admire nothing, but of infinite *complacency* and *satisfaction*. On two conspi-

cuous occasions in the ministry of Jesus Christ,—at his baptism and at his transfiguration,—did the Eternal Father proclaim, by a voice from heaven, "*This* is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: *hear Him!*" In every part of revelation we find the Son of God represented by the Father as the object of his dearest, his most intense interest. "Behold," says he, "my servant whom I have chosen! mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth!" "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth take counsel against the Lord, and against his Anointed; He that sitteth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn: then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, *Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Sion:* be wise, therefore, ye kings; *kiss the Son,* lest he be angry, and ye perish!" In the opening of the epistle to the Hebrews, we read that "God hath appointed his Son, who is the brightness of his glory, the heir of all things;" and that, "to the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom: and Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they shall perish, but *thou* remainest!" It seems as if the *divine mind were concentrated—as if all the Deity were busied and intent*—in the scene of redemption and the person of the Redeemer! It seems as if the Great Eternal could find no *other* medium in which he might pour out the whole treasury of his perfections,—satisfy his infinite conceptions and desires, display and harmonize all his various attributes—his holiness, his justice, his mercy, and his love,—than Jesus Christ, "the power and the wisdom of God!" Here he shines in his complete and blended glory,—at once the "just God," and the justifying Saviour of him that believeth in Jesus Christ. Here, doubtless, is presented an object the most glorious and delightful in the universe of God! There is reason to believe that, in a *moral* (that is, in the *highest*) point of view, the Redeemer, in the depth of his humiliation, was a greater object of attention and approbation, in the eye of his Father, than when he sat in his

original glory at God's right hand; the one being his *natural*, the other peculiarly his *moral* elevation.

Encompassed by so great a cloud of witnesses—summoned by so many powerful voices—let us all more earnestly than ever attend to this incomparable object: so shall we be prepared for the trials of life, the agonies of death, the solemnities of the judgement, and the felicities of the eternal world; so shall we *inherit* the unsearchable *treasures of grace and glory.*

XIV.

THE ADVANTAGES OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT CONTRASTED WITH THE BLESSINGS OF THE SPIRITUAL KINGDOM OF JESUS CHRIST.*

[PREACHED AT BRIDGE-STREET MEETING, BRISTOL, SEPTEMBER, 1822, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY.]

2 SAM. vii. 16, 17.—*Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.*

THESE words, you are aware, are part of the message which the Lord addressed to David by the mouth of Nathan, at the time when David meditated raising the temple to the Lord. He was not indeed permitted to execute that design, but the Lord accepted him "according to all that was in his *heart;*" and commissioned the prophet Nathan to assure him, that his throne and kingdom should be confirmed, without interruption and termination, to his lineal successors, without ever again suffering such an instance of the *departure* of divine favour as that which had occurred in the removal of the family of Saul from the throne: "*Thy* throne shall be established for ever." This promise was verified to the

* Printed from the Notes of the Rev. Thomas Grinfield.

successors of David in so extraordinary a manner, as compels us to regard their history as an example of the particular intention and interposition of God's providence. The direct line of succession was preserved unbroken (with a single exception, that of Athaliah,* which was of short continuance) in the house of David; and, while the history of the kings of *Israel* (after the separation of the ten tribes under Rehoboam's reign) became a subject of some perplexity by perpetual irregularities in the succession, it is remarkable that the kings of *Judah* succeed each other in perfect order, during a period of five hundred years. It is true, that during a long interval,—from the captivity to the incarnation of our blessed Lord,—the throne of Judah, as well as that of Israel, fell into a state of deep decline and depression, so that the traces of its history are almost extinct: yet still the house of David *existed*, it was still *preserved* and *known*;—the kingdom was in a state of abeyance—of *suspended*, not *abolished*, exercise: and it was *resumed and renewed*, and improved into higher glories, in the person of *Jesus Christ*;—the true, spiritual, substantial *David*; of *whose* kingdom (it cannot reasonably be doubted by any) that of David himself was at once a *type* and a *part*. The empire of Christ was the *sequel* and *consummation* of that which had originated in the son of Jesse;—and hence our Saviour is so often styled the *Son* of *David*. The angel at his nativity announced him as "He who should be great, and should sit upon the throne of his father David, and of whose kingdom there should be no end;" while the evangelists, for the same reason, take pains to convince us that he descended from David by an exact *genealogy*. The *perpetuity*, so emphatically promised in the text and many other places, to the kingdom of *David*, immediately pointed to the everlasting reign of Messiah, to which alone that attribute could strictly belong. Our Saviour inherited this empire, not in consequence of his essential divinity, but of his *incarnation* and his *mediatorial* undertaking. His

* 2 Kings, chap. xi

divinity, of which I trust all present are deeply convinced, was a *requisite* indeed, but it was not (properly speaking) the *cause* of his receiving and exercising this spiritual dominion. *Unless* he had been a person of the most Holy Trinity, it is evident he could not have sustained a sovereignty which requires universal knowledge and power: but his *Deity* could not have been the *reason* of his sustaining it; or else the Father and the Holy Spirit, being each Divine, must have inherited this throne as well as the Son of God. If *all* power was committed to him, it was (as he declares) because he was the Son of *Man*. Like the typical David, He approached and ascended to his throne, through much difficulty and suffering; he had to combat and conquer many and malicious enemies: though, during his ministry on earth, he gathered about him a few friends and followers—(as David had also done, amidst the persecutions of Saul)—it was not until he had risen from the grave, and was ready to ascend to heaven, that he could use that triumphant language, "*All* power is given unto *Me* in heaven and in earth!" The *commencement* of his reign may be dated from his resurrection, or from his session at the Father's right hand: it was *then* the Father said, "Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Ever since that era he has *continued* and advanced his empire; and (as the apostle observes) He must go on reigning until "he hath put all enemies under his feet."

In the following remarks let me request your candid attention—*first*, to the principal *advantages* to be expected in a well-ordered government *on earth;* and, *then*, to the *corresponding*, and infinitely more important advantages, which may be enjoyed under the *spiritual* government of Jesus Christ.

I. The first and primary advantage expected from every well-constituted human government is *security*, and the *sense* of security. The depravity of our nature has introduced such a universal selfishness and rapacity among mankind in their *natural* state, that men in every age and country have been convinced of the expediency and necessity of attempting to *organise some*

form of government for the purpose of their common security. While every individual is left to exert his own power as he chooses, none can be secure either in his property or person: it becomes absolutely indispensable, therefore, if men would escape the *intolerable* evils of such a state, to collect and embody this scattered and uncertain force of the many, in some *public depository* of power: such a provision is *necessary* for the protection and preservation of every community. Hence almost all nations, even the most uncivilized, have attempted *some* constitution of this kind, however rude, for the prevention or the redress of those injuries to which the subjects were continually liable by the passions of our nature. Where the supreme power is lodged in the person of *one*, the government is called a *monarchy;* where it is reposed in the hands of a *few*, an *aristocracy;* and where the *people* share it in common among themselves, it becomes a *democracy.* Whatever may be the imperfections attaching to each of these modes of government, the *worst* is preferable to a state of society destitute of public authority and law: in *such* a state there can exist not only no *security*, but no *tranquillity;* it must be a state of perpetual apprehension and terror, in which none would feel themselves free to pursue either the arts of life or the acquisitions of trade. Even when an individual might himself escape for a time the assaults of rapacity, in such a state he would have to endure (what would be perhaps to some a still greater evil) the fearful *expectation* of his turn to suffer; and the *nearer* he beheld the acts of outrage, the deeper must be the impression of alarm on his mind,—just as (if a humble illustration may be excused) when a stone is thrown into water, while the agitation is greatest at the spot where it falls, the effect extends in the circles that are formed around, though it becomes more and more faint as they recede farther from the centre.

But the utmost degree of personal *security* that can be enjoyed under any form of civil power, is a most imperfect shadow of the *safety* which Jesus Christ bestows

upon the subjects of his *spiritual* reign. Until a man submits to *His* mediatorial authority, he remains exposed to unutterable evils. He *ought* to feel perpetual anxiety and alarm; for, in the declared judgement of God, he is in a state of *condemnation* and *death* :—"he that believeth not in the Son of God is condemned *already*;" he that is not "quickened together with Christ Jesus" is "*dead* in trespasses and sins:" he is a criminal under sentence of execution, and only respited for a brief and uncertain period; the sword of divine justice, suspended over him, may fall at any moment, and he is lost for ever. This is certainly the condition of every unconverted sinner,—every one that has not yielded himself a willing subject to Jesus Christ his Lord. But "kiss the Son;" yield yourself as such a subject to *Him*; and, from that moment, you are placed in a state of perfect *security*; you are *saved with a great salvation*,—protected from the wrath of God, from the dread of eternity, from the misery of sin; according to the prophet's beautiful description of our Saviour—"In that day a King shall reign in righteousness; and a Man shall be as a covert from the storm, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The subjects of Jesus Christ, justified by faith, have *peace* with God. The last donation he promised his disciples was peace:—"Peace I leave with you; *my* peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you." "*My* peace!"—the same peace which filled the bosom of the eternal Son of God, when, having finished his work, he was acknowledged by the Father as his "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." For, "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts,"—of His Son, the first-born of many *brethren*. And (as the apostle argues) "if *God* be for us, who shall be against us? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Shall *God* that justifieth? Who is he that condemneth? *Christ* that *died*, yea, rather that is *risen* for us? Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?"—The *church* of Christ, as a collective society, is invested with absolute security; it is a city

on whose walls is engraven the name "JEHOVAH SHAMMAH, THE LORD IS THERE!" it stands fast "like Mount Sion that *cannot be moved;*" it is founded on a *Rock*, and that Rock is Christ: He has "all power in heaven and earth" for its preservation; and not "the gates of hell shall prevail against it." But a *portion* of this general security of the body belongs to every member of it: *every* believer in Christ enjoys the same; and, as he grows in grace and knowledge, he enjoys also the *sense* of this security; he *feels* himself at peace with God; this peace *keeps* and fortifies his heart and mind against every assailing trouble; and, on the most trying occasions, he learns to say with humble confidence, "I will go forth in the *strength* of the Lord."

2. The second benefit expected from human governments is *liberty.* So far as this advantage is consistent with the former, or with the public *security*, the more largely it is enjoyed the better. Every *diminution* of liberty, except such as is necessary to our *protection* from evils which might otherwise be apprehended, is itself just so much redundant *evil.* All *wanton*, all merely *arbitrary* restrictions, upon the freedom of individuals, are to be regarded as some of the greatest calamities which mankind can sustain from each other; inasmuch as they strike directly at those principles of free thought and action which are the sources of all noble enterprise, energy, and excellence. Restraint, that cannot be justified by the production of some *greater* benefit than could be attained without it, is not imperfection; it is injustice. But, suppose the utmost possible degree of *civil* liberty enjoyed, what is it in comparison with that *spiritual*, *real* freedom, which Jesus Christ confers? The former is, at the best, only an *external*, circumstantial blessing; it does not enter into the *inner man.* But "if the *Son* shall make you free, you shall be *free indeed:* "where the Spirit of the Lord is," *there* is the only true liberty. The Christian is the genuine freeman, and none beside is such except in name. His indeed is a glorious liberty: from the moment he enters into the kingdom of grace and truth, he is loosed out of

prison, and leaves his bonds behind; invigorated with a divine strength, he purposes, and it stands fast; *he triumphs over himself;* he is victorious over the world with all its allurements or afflictions; he tramples upon the greatest tyrants,—the *powers* of darkness, the *rulers* of the disobedient; from that moment he is emancipated from the spirit of bondage; he walks at liberty; he can look beyond the grave; humble and yet confident, prostrate, and yet not confounded, even in the prospect of appearing before God; and, having overcome all, he "sits down in heavenly places with Jesus Christ,"—even as He also, having overcome all by death, sat down in glory at the right hand of his Father. This is a perfect liberty: not an evil can be felt or feared, but it may be thus removed. This is an immortal, everlasting liberty; a freedom which confers on its possessors the sublime title of "the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty."

3. The next advantage derived from a good government is *plenty.* To secure this advantage, you are aware that there are arrangements in nature, in a great measure independent of human institutions, and beyond the control of human policy. But perhaps, in this respect, there has been often much error on the part of those in power. In general it may be asserted that *human* laws should not interfere *too much:* no set of men can be supposed to understand the interests of particular classes as well as the individuals concerned understand their own interests. Every one should be left at liberty, as far as possible, to choose *his own way* in pursuing his own prosperity; and the aggregate prosperity of the nation will be best consulted by allowing the utmost scope to that of every *individual.* The prevailing tendency in every government is to legislate too much: and here, it may just be remarked, there are two obvious evils to be avoided;—those who legislate should be careful, in the first place, not to lay on too many impositions; and, secondly, not to introduce any unnecessary restrictions. The utmost that human wisdom can achieve must be imperfect: under the best system of government the-

must remain many cases of poverty and distress: but in the kingdom of Jesus Christ there exists an infinite plenty of all the provisions that can be desired for all the wants of the soul. *None* are neglected here: the poorest may be enriched beyond the most splendid opulence of this world, even with "the *unsearchable* riches of Christ;" as the apostles, "though *poor*, could *make many rich*,—though they *had nothing*, they *possessed all things*." For in Jesus Christ "*all* fulness" dwells, for the supply of spiritual destitution. "Fulness" of *knowledge*: knowledge is the great distinction of the mind,—and here is all *spiritual* knowledge. Christ is himself the wisdom of God: to know him is to attain at once the highest knowledge; it is to have the spirit which "searcheth all things, even the deep things of God," and ultimately to "*know even as we are known*." "Fulness" of *holiness*: holiness is the proper riches and beauty of the soul; and the subjects of Christ are created anew in holiness after His image. "Fulness" of *consolation*: the greatest comforts that ever visited the troubled heart of man, are those which flow from Christ as their fountain; it is He who has brought to light consolations entirely new, such as had never before entered into the thoughts of men; and well might he say, "*Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in* ME." "Fulness," once more, as it respects the inheritance in reserve; —"*an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*;—of which the saints have at certain seasons a present sense and foretaste, though the light of eternity is required to display its real extent,—to display the accessible fulness of the present Saviour. These are durable treasures: they can never be taken away from us,—they form part of *ourselves*,—they are carried about with us wherever we go; no moth corrupts, no thief invades. There can exist no distinction here between the rich and the poor; no room for the frown of pride, or luxurious excess on the one side, while we behold despised poverty and pining want on the other: all is equality and unity, the consequence

of unlimited abundance,—abundance commensurate with all the demands of a perishing universe.

4. A tendency to *improvement* in *its social institutions*, is a fourth benefit which ought to accompany every well-ordered government. The best of those institutions are such as will be at once *permanent* and *progressive*, by their intrinsic wisdom and excellence,—by their adaptation to all the varying circumstances of the nation,—by their power of providing for unseen and possible emergencies: they will gradually rise from security to convenience, and then exalt convenience into ornament—into just refinement and diffused illumination: such has been the aim of the greatest legislators. Under the scorching climate of despotism all the fruits of the mind are withered: a dull monotony prevails in the moral scene; the powers of men, unable to expand, attain only a dwarfish growth: while in a *free* state, where liberty of thought is allowed to all, the faculties and virtues have room for exercise,—they flourish as in a climate congenial with their nature; and such, on the whole, is eminently the condition of this favoured and distinguished country.

But the difference between the most moral and the most flagitious of natural characters, is less than the difference that subsists between the subjects of Jesus Christ and the children of this world; because the latter is the difference between the spiritually *dead* and *living*. "The wisdom of *God*" is discovered to those only who *believe* in *Jesus Christ; all others* sit *in darkness:* for, "*after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*" We see this verified in all the history of nations. Without pretending to determine how far human reason may proceed *alone*, it may be safely affirmed that the *least instructed* portion of every country in which christianity is professed, possess far juster views of the leading truths of religion,—such as the character of *God*, the nature of *sin*, the obligation of *virtue*, the *eternal* world,—than ever were entertained by the most inquiring pagans. The great abstractions of

the gospel were never *touched* by *man*,—they remained shut up in the bosom of Deity; and there they must have remained for ever, had not *He* disclosed them by Jesus Christ, *the Light of the world.* They surpass the natural mind in its widest excursions, its profoundest researches, its sublimest elevations. Yet these are the vital essential principles of the soul,—these are the germs of all excellence and happiness,—these, wherever they are known, are found to have a purifying and an exalting influence upon mankind,—these effectually tend to *moralize* and *beautify* society. The gospel empire possesses in itself interminable energies, and tendencies to benefit its subjects. No other reason can be assigned why our country and Europe should differ so greatly from the ancient nations, and should so far excel the most cultivated among them, regarded in a moral estimate; no other reason than this, that the *light of Jesus Christ* has shone upon us like a finer Sun—*the* "*Sun of Righteousness.*" All those elysian images of prophecy which paint with so much beauty the latter days of the world, are nothing, in their substantial fulfilment, but the impress of Jesus Christ on the minds and manners of mankind, the image of Christianity embodied in society, "*the earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord,*" and *righteousness* dwelling in the new-created universe.

5. The fifth and last requisite of a well-constituted government is *stability:* this is the crown of all its other advantages. Nothing can be wanting to *such* a reign but that it should *last:* and this is what the text emphatically expresses,—"*Thy throne shall be established for ever:*" as the Psalmist says of the Messiah, "*He shall reign as long as the sun and moon endure.*" In this the kingdom of David was an emblem, however faint, of that which would be erected by Jesus Christ; wonderfully preserved as was the throne of Judah, while the greatest monarchies were marked by perpetual vicissitudes: the kings of Israel were ever changing in their *line*, while the descendants of David *maintained a direct* succession. No Roman emperor, with the exception of Vespasian, was followed by his *proper* successor, during

a hundred and fifty years from the time of Julius Cæsar: they passed and chased one another like shadows. *Here*, meanwhile, "in the house of Judah," was a *preternatural* stability, destined as an image (though an imperfect image) of the fixed, indestructible empire of *Jesus Christ*. *His* throne has never been shaken for a moment; He has appeared without a rival in the field. Who has ever dared to question His pretensions? who has dared to challenge a comparison with Him in *prophecies*, in *miracles*, in *virtues*, in *doctrines?* Not a doubt has been entertained among competent judges of his being the *true* Messiah; all the servants of God have been ready, in reference to His dominion, to adopt the well-known exclamation of an excellent man, "*Esto perpetua!*"* Of *His* kingdom let there be no end. We may truly say, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the world stand up, and the rulers take counsel against the Lord and his Messiah; but *He* shall break their bonds asunder, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." There has appeared on earth no other universal interest than this;—none which has bound all hearts together as the heart of one man. In minor points we may follow a thousand different paths; but when the question is, whether Jesus Christ shall reign,—whether the kingdom of Jesus Christ shall be extended,—we are ready to forget all our distinctions,—we are all united,—we are all as one man. Not that the stability of His kingdom depends merely on human exertions: God has staked his character and all his perfections upon its establishment; He has pledged his word and oath for its success:—"The jealousy of the Lord of Hosts will do this, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Nothing but the extension of this empire is necessary to change the wilderness into a paradise, and exalt the condition of *earth* into a resemblance of *heaven*. And we have reason to hope the destined period is not re-

* The last words of Paul Sarpi, expressive of his wish for the immortal glory of his country, to whose cause he died a martyr.

mote: our children's children may live to witness the cessation of wars under the sceptre of the Prince of Peace;—to witness the *expectation of eternity and heaven* diffused among all the partakers of our nature. Lend your helping hand to the promotion of such an object. Convert base riches, "the mammon of unrighteousness," into the means of imparting spiritual treasure, the instrument of conveying "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory,"—into a link, an important link, in the chain that connects earth with heaven. You are not called out to endure the burden and heat of the day; you are permitted, while sitting under your vine and fig-tree, to assist, in a way at once easy and effectual, the diffusion of the privileges and immunities of this heavenly kingdom over the whole world; the recovery of a vast neglected portion of our race to the happy condition of those who are the subjects of Jesus Christ.

XV.

THE ENLARGEMENT OF CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE.*

[PREACHED FOR THE BAPTIST MISSION, AT BROADMEAD, BRISTOL, AUGUST 6, 1824.]

2 Cor. vi. 13.—*Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.*

The Corinthian church was early infested by false teachers, who opposed themselves to the apostle Paul, and, forming their own sects and factions, endeavoured to substitute their corruptions of the faith for his pure and divine doctrine. To the cure of this disease he had addressed himself in a former, and he pursued the same design in this epistle. In doing this, he found himself compelled, though the humblest of men, to remind the

* Printed from the Notes of the Rev. Thomas Grinfield.

Corinthians of the extraordinary evidences he had given of the most devoted zeal in the cause of Christ, while he adverted to his manifold sacrifices and exertions. In the context he speaks in the affectionate language of a parent appealing to his children: " O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open to you, our heart is enlarged: ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged." Endeavour (as if he said) to *meet* me upon the same ground of affectionate attachment, on which I desire to embrace you in Christ. In discoursing on these words, I propose, for our mutual advantage, first, to *illustrate* in what this enlargement consists, and, secondly, to *enforce* it.

I. With respect to the first point,---in what the enlargement mentioned in the text consists,---let it be remarked, first, that it is not to be understood as consisting in expansion of *intellect*, in that kind of mental enlargement which arises from the discoveries of science and philosophy: for this, however ornamental, or however useful it may be, is by no means necessarily connected with a divine influence on the heart. Nothing can be more familiar to our knowledge or observation, than the melancholy instances of those in whose character extreme deficiencies and blemishes of a *moral* kind form a striking contrast to brilliancy of intellect. It is sufficient, in illustration, to remind you of the examples which have been so abundantly furnished by a neighbouring kingdom. Probably, there may exist some remote tendency in intellectual enlargement, to expand the heart in benevolent sensibility; but the connexion is not so close, nor the effect so certain, as to justify any great dependence; and those who infer from the improvement of reason a proportionate advancement in virtue, will find their expectation too often frustrated.

There are others who flatter themselves that they possess superior enlargement of soul to most around them, because they entertain an equal indifference to all the vanities of human opinion in religious subjects, and feel no regard for any sect or creed. This would, no doubt,

be a very cheap and easy doctrine to embrace: by those who are indifferent, concessions are *easily* made to almost any extent; and there can be no great liberality in sacrificing truth, where no real attachment to truth is felt. In the apostle Paul we find the *reverse* of such a character: exactly in proportion as he became attached and devoted to "the truth as it is in Jesus," he exhibited the increase of his real benevolence and self-denying exertions. Genuine enlargement of charity consists in *seeking* the salvation of men,---not in complimenting them with a pretended candour. Nothing can be really more cruel, however varnished with a gloss of liberality, than the attempt to explain away the most clear and awful sanctions of divine truth, when we are expressly assured, "he that believeth, shall be saved; he that believeth not, shall be damned!" True spiritual wisdom is shown,---not in such a promiscuous confusion of all parts of truth, but in proportioning our regard for every part to its own importance and magnitude.

On the *positive* side of the subject: the christian enlargement recommended consists in a real benevolence to the *whole* church of Christ, as opposed to any selfish views of *our own* salvation, or of *our own* church, as exclusively concerned. The nearer we approximate to universal love, the higher we ascend in the scale of christian excellence. There are some, though we would hope the number is small, who live solely to *themselves:* who are so perfectly absorbed in selfishness as to neglect all around them; who regard whatever does not conduce to their own immediate gain or pleasure as so much loss: the proper sentiment we should entertain toward the spirit these exemplify, is that of supreme contempt.

Others limit their benevolence to the circle of their own family, or of their acquaintance; these rise above the former in proportion as they possess more of the enlargement we would illustrate; they mingle their affections with *others*, and identify their happiness with that of those who are most nearly connected with themselves.

Others advance far beyond this: they extend their

benevolent interest over a much *wider* circle; they feel for every case of distress, and rejoice in every opportunity of benefit that falls within their view. Their emotions are of the same kind with the former, but, taking an ampler range, they proportionably raise the moral character.

But suppose the *whole nation* to be embraced by an individual; suppose him forgetful of all merely personal or private interests, to devote himself entirely to the public benefit of his country; he holds the scales of justice,---he allays discord, alleviates the wretchedness of want, exposes his very *life* in the service of the state; and in every respect acts under the impression of his forming only a part of the whole. Here is a far higher order of character; and the reason is, that it has more of the true enlargement recommended by the apostle. And this is the utmost extent of human benevolence, apart from the divine religion of Jesus Christ. The proud Roman confined all his benevolence to the city of Rome, and regarded the remoter provinces merely as subservient to the wealth and splendour of that enormous capital; while all the world, beyond the limits of the empire, was despised as a mass of despicable barbarism. To view the world as one united whole,—mankind as one family, all nations as *one blood*,—springing from *one* Father of all, tending to *one* destiny,—this enlargement of heart, however just and natural, never entered into the views, or at least never regulated the conduct, of the most enlightened men in the pagan world.

But suppose us enabled to open our eyes to a comprehensive view of mankind as one vast family; suppose the Divine Being to have clearly discovered himself as the Universal Father, of whom all are alike the children by *nature*, and from whom all have alike departed by *sin*: suppose him to have shown us that all are in the same lapsed condition, and that one great method of recovery has been provided for all: that there is one immense society of holy beings, whether men or angels, to which we are all invited by the gospel: what should be the effect of such a revelation, but first to attach us to

God as our common centre, and then to the whole family of man as called to form the *church of God?*—for, in such a view, we come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the saints,—to God the Judge of all,—to Jesus Christ the mediator between God and man!

II. In the second place, I proceed to *enforce* this spirit of christian enlargement, by reminding you of some of its *motives and reasons.*

1. First, this spirit is perfectly *reasonable* and in harmony with *nature;*—with nature, that is, as the production of God, though not as transformed by sin. This enlargement of soul is one of the great lines of demarcation between *man* and the inferior creation—this property of his mind, by which he is capable of considering himself as part of the whole,—capable of abstracting and generalizing his ideas, and of forming a conception of contributing to the moral system. The more pious, the more truly enlightened men become, the more they feel and cherish this most important sentiment, this moral abstraction and expansion. Again we are evidently so circumstanced in the present world, that we are perpetually and inevitably *led out of ourselves:* it is impossible to lay down any practicable system of conduct which would insulate us from our species, and confine us to *ourselves* entirely. There are several natural emotions of the mind that are purely social and benevolent: such is the sentiment of *pity* or *compassion*, which it is impossible to explain on any other supposition. Pity *identifies* us with others: those who have attempted to resolve it into a *selfish* pleasure as its origin, forget that this pleasure itself must be traced to a *previous* concern for distress as its cause. It is absurd to suppose we must *first* feel the pleasure, and *then* exercise the pity; this is to mistake the effect for the cause, and to leave no *basis* for the emotion. In all our social affections, supposing them genuine and not merely pretended, we act on the ground of a *disinterested* benevolence; we make our happiness out of that of *others:* it is *their* happiness, not *our own*, that we primarily seek.

2. Further: this enlargement agrees with the genius of christianity,—of that divine system under which we profess to be forming our character. For what is christianity? It is to *believe* in the redemption of the world by *Christ* the Son of God. This is the simplest view of revelation; but this is the grand display of the *divine* benevolence: "*Herein is love: not that we loved God. but that he loved us, and gave his Son a ransom for us.*" "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,*" &c. It is this *fact* to which your attention is directed; the fact alone is stated: those who are not moved by such a fact as this, no conceptions of thought, no eloquence of words, nothing that can be added, can reach their hearts! Such a gift of God—such a condescension of Christ—speaks for itself, or none can speak for it. Hence the apostle declares, "*The love of Christ constrains us,*" bears us along with itself in the same direction, impels us towards the *same object*, *identifies* us with the love of Christ to sinners, and the glory of God in their salvation. Such an example of compassionate benevolence,—of enlargement of heart,—once perceived and felt, absorbs the soul. In the spectacle of "God manifested in the flesh," the greatest extremes and contrarieties are united; majesty and meanness the most distant; the highest excellence and the lowest degradation! And the natural effect is to assimilate our hearts; the first fruit of the Spirit of Christ on his apostles was union. The earliest disciples began at once to organize themselves into a body, all standing fast in one fellowship, all minding the same thing, all drinking of the same Spirit: they gave themselves "first to the Lord, and then to each other;" they loved one another as brethren in Christ Jesus.

In the communion of the saints, such as theirs, the rich blessings of the gospel are most deeply enjoyed. At first the apostles, not sufficiently illuminated, retained some remains of their exclusive prejudices, some lingering of that selfishness which is the old plague and epidemical malady of human nature. They aimed at narrowing and monopolizing the gospel within the circle

of Jewish proselytes. But, as the Sun of Righteousness rose with increasing brightness upon their minds, they purged off their prejudices, and came early to a perfect compliance with the injunction---"*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature:*" they understood and proclaimed that there was "*neither Greek, nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free.*" And the same spirit is realised in proportion as men are christianized: they live "*kindly affectioned one toward another; forbearing and forgiving, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven themselves:* they *feel* that "*none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself.*" The most eminent saints have been shining examples of this: Moses prayed that he might be *blotted* out of God's book, rather than all the people. The apostle Paul, perhaps, above the whole apostolic college, exhibited the love of his Master imparted to his mind: he could even wish himself *accursed for the sake of his brethren;* he sympathized with every member of the christian body: "*Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?*" &c.; "*beside that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*"

3. This enlarged benevolence may be farther enforced by *its aspect on our own happiness.* This, indeed, is a secondary motive,—secondary to the glory of God, the ultimate end of all things, and to the precepts of Christ, the authoritative rule of conduct. We are not to seek our own happiness in any other way than that which is consistent with these: but here it may be truly said, "He that loves his life shall lose it, and he that loses his life for the gospel shall find it." The more we embody ourselves and our happiness with the interest of others. ---the interests of the whole, the more in reality we consult our own happiness. In the pursuit of any merely solitary schemes, we shall reap only disappointment: if we attempt to *detach* ourselves from the general mass, to *individualize* ourselves from the community of our species, we shall be *imprisoned* and *pent in.* When the barriers of selfishness are broken down, and the current of benevolence is suffered to flow generously abroad, and

circulate far and near around, then we are in a capacity of the greatest and best enjoyment. Happiness must be sought, not so much in a direct as in an indirect way,—the way which has been marked by God and by Jesus Christ. In order to be happy in any high degree, we must abandon ourselves, according to his will, and after the pattern of his Son, to the temporal and spiritual benefit of mankind. The apostle was a bright illustration of this: he laid himself out in body and soul,—he spent and was spent for others: filled with the most enlarged views of the glory of God as displayed in the salvation of men,—ravished with the ineffable beauty of redemption,—he was ready to do and suffer all things that might be required in the promotion of such an end; and the prisoner at Philippi and Rome was infinitely happier than Nero on the throne.

Some may suppose an exception must be made in favour of the private exercises of *devotion.* Devotional pleasures may be enjoyed, perhaps, in the highest degree, in retirement; but we may err in extremes even here: we must not be *epicures* even in devotion. It is possible to be so intent upon meditative duties, as to deviate from the appointed course of social usefulness, as it is made manifest in the character of Jesus Christ and his apostles.

Would you escape the corrosions of domestic affliction, beware of concentring your affections within too confined a circle of beloved objects, lest, like Micah, when deprived of his images of worship, you be constrained to cry, "*Ye have taken away my gods.*" Be assured, my brethren, the more you diffuse and multiply yourselves upon a wide surface of benevolence, the better you will be guarded against the afflictions and bereavements of life. The Christian, whose heart is enlarged in love to his brethren, sows a soil that cannot but yield him an abundant produce.

4. Lastly, this expanded benevolence is intimately connected with the *promotion of all public good.* It would be trifling with your attention to show that its influence on our *usefulness* is yet more *direct* than that

which it exerts on our *happiness.* There is nothing on which the present age may be more justly congratulated than its attention to public good. In the duties of *private* devotion, in abstinence, and deadness to the world, our ancestors have often greatly exceeded us: but, from various causes, they manifested much less of this enlarged christian benevolence; they pursued salvation too much as an insulated and a selfish concern. Great care was taken to explain the most vital principles of religion,—to lay well the foundations of the sinner's peace with God,—to build up the believer in all the highest views of Christ and holiness: but a zealous activity in the diffusion of christianity was reserved to be the distinguishing feature of our own generation of the church. It is wonderful to reflect that three hundred years have passed since the protestant reformation, and yet that the establishment of *missions* is, comparatively, an affair of yesterday;—that now, for the first time, christians appear to feel the foree of the command, "*Go ye into all the world.*" Hence our multitude of sabbath and national schools;—hence the Bible circulated by thousands and by millions;—hence the consecrated use of our commercial and naval advantages, to waft to the most retired and unknown corners of the earth, treasures of immensely greater value than any which had ever before been carried abroad, even "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

1. In conclusion, permit me briefly to suggest to you two or three important modes of attaining this christian enlargement of heart:—

1. In order to its attainment, you must, in the first place, cultivate an acquaintance with God; "*Acquaint thyself with God.*" First, draw near to the *Father*, in that new and living way which he has opened to your approach by the sacrifice of his beloved Son: then will this spirit of benevolence, like an elastic fluid, circulate from your heart to every human being: for "*whoso loveth him that begot, will also love all those that are begotten.*" Once taste for yourself that the Lord is gracious, and then go abroad, and, like the apostles, you will find that you

"*cannot but speak of what you have seen and heard:*" or like the woman of Samaria, you will call upon others, "*Come, and see a man who hath told me all things that ever I did; is not this the* CHRIST?" Begin *here:* the acts and exercises of benevolence will prove the natural emanations of this holy fountain.

2. In order to attain this principle, and to improve it, we must exercise ourselves in *prayer* for the Holy Spirit's influence. Spiritual influence from above is the true element of our sanctification; and by *this* alone can our hearts be truly enlarged in love to man. The ointment which Christ received was the Holy Spirit; and that sacred unction must descend to the skirts of his clothing —must be diffused among all his followers; then christians will follow *his* example, who preached the gospel to the *poor*, gave light to the blind, and liberty to the captives: healed the broken-hearted, and proclaimed to all around the redemption of our God.

3. Thirdly, and finally, if you would cultivate an enlarged spirit of love, connect yourself *with great objects* of beneficence. The mind takes a tincture from the objects it pursues. If you engage your attention in the concerns of christian philanthropy, your mind will be dilated in proportion to your ardour—in the ratio of cause and effect. The way of extensive benevolence is now opened and prepared by God: and it is become as much the duty of every christian to assist foreign *missions* as to assist the christian *ministry* at home. From us, as from the ancient Zion, must the word of the Lord go forth; the waters of the sanctuary must be diffused by our exertions until, rising by degrees, they overspread all lands. The only question with every one should be, What can *I* do in the support of this great cause? How can I touch and quicken the springs and movements of that vast machinery which is now in such extended operation? It is a day in which the voice of Providence to all is, "*Come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty.*" The powers of darkness are awake and zealous; Satan seeks to excite his agents to new activity, "*In great wrath, because he knows that he has but a short time.*"

Our duty is to oppose his machinations with the only antagonist force,—to set up the kingdom of Christ against him. This has already been attempted with great success. Missionaries have gone forth (Dr. Carey in particular) in the true spirit of martyrs at the stake; they have deliberately and joyfully gone forth from their country and their home into a perpetual and voluntary exile. *You*, my brethren, are called to *no* such sacrifices: how different the circumstances in which *you* may fulfil this part of your christian vocation!—*you* have only to sit still, to draw from your private store, and distribute a portion of that superfluity with which Providence has blessed you, and thus, while you remain at home, you may touch the wheels of the machine which produces such incalculable good. It is a happy circumstance of the age in which we live, that even filthy lucre may thus be transformed into a mean of the most extensive spiritual beneficence. And what equal use can you make of your substance? When life is hastening to its close, the world itself must pass away, with all that it contains; and *true converts* to christianity are the only portion of its inhabitants, that shall emerge from its ruins and enter into "*the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness:*"—the only portion that shall be gathered together in an eternal and blessed society around the throne of God and of the Lamb. The divisions and distinctions of christians vanish away before such a prospect. The spirit of missions, indeed, has proverbially contributed to harmonize the church of Christ; and to give signs of the approach of that bright æra, when the names of sect or party shall no more be heard, but all shall form "*one fold under one Shepherd.*—Finally, remember that you are expected to act as stewards of the manifold gifts of God; that *neutrality* in a cause like this is peculiarly detestable. Remember who has said, "*He that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad:*" while He has declared, as an immutable axiom, that "*it is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Remember the apostle's solemn charge, that you "*trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all*

things to enjoy: that you do *good, and be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate: laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that you may lay hold on eternal life."*

XVI.

MARKS OF LOVE TO GOD.*

[PREACHED AT BRIDGE STREET, BRISTOL, SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 22, 1824.]

JOHN v. 42.—*But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.*

THE persons whom our Lord addressed in these words made a high profession of religion, valued themselves upon their peculiar opportunities of knowing the true God and his will, and proclaimed themselves as the Israel and the temple of the Lord, while they despised the surrounding pagans as those who were strangers to the divine law. Yet the self-complacent Pharisees of our Saviour's age were as far from the love of God, he assures them in the text, as any of those who had never heard of his name. In this respect, *many of " the first were last, and the last first."* The rejection of the gospel evinces a hardness of heart which is *decisive* against the character; and, in the case of the Pharisees, it gave ample evidence that they possessed no love of God. Had they really known *God*, as our Lord argues, they would have known *himself* to be sent by God: whereas, in proving the bitter enemies of Christ, they proved that they were in a state of enmity against God. By parity of reason, *we*, my brethren, who know God and his word in the way of christian profession, ought *not* to take it for granted that we possess the love of God, and are in the way of eternal life: the same self-delusion may over-

* Printed from the Notes of the Rev. Thomas Grinfield. These Notes present a valuable example of that species of Mr. Hall's preaching, in which, throughout the sermon, he kept pressing the application upon the consciences and hearts of his hearers.

take *us* also; and similar admonitions may be no less necessary to many present, than to the Pharisees of old. Suffer then, my brethren, the word of exhortation, while I invite each individual seriously to consider this subject, with a view to the discovery of his real character.

In proceeding to lay down certain *marks* of grace, let it be premised, that either these marks partake of the *nature* of true religion, or they do *not*. If they *do*, they must be *identified* with it, and here the mark is the *thing*: if they do *not* partake of its nature, some of them may exist as indications where genuine religion is not. It is necessary, then, that we combine a *variety* of particular *signs* of grace: any *one* taken by itself, may, or may *not*, exist, *without* true religion; but where *many* are combined, no just doubt can remain.

Whether you have the love of God in your soul, presents a most critical subject of inquiry; since the love of God will be acknowledged by all to be the great, the essential, principle of true religion. The simple question then, to which I would call your attention, is this,—"Am I, or am I not, a sincere lover of the Author of my being?"

In endeavouring to assist you in the decision of this momentous question, as it respects yourselves,

I. I shall entreat your attention while I suggest a variety of *marks* which indicate love to God; and,

II. Supposing the conviction produced by the statement to be, that you have *not* the love of God, I shall point out the proper improvement of such a conviction.

I. In suggesting various marks by which you may ascertain whether you love God, or not, I would mention,

1. The *general* bent and turn of your *thoughts*, when not under the immediate control of circumstances; for these, you are aware, give a new and peculiar bias to our thoughts, and stamp them with an impress of their own. There is an infinite variety of thoughts continually passing through the mind of every individual; of these, some are thrown up by occasions; but others, and often the greater part, follow the habitual train of our associations. It is not to thoughts of the former kind that I refer; it

is to those of the latter class,—those *voluntary* thoughts which spring up of *themselves* in the mind of every person: it is these, not the former, that afford clear indication of the *general temper and disposition*. The question I would propose to you is, What is the bent of your thoughts, when, disengaged from the influence of any particular occurrence, you are left to *yourselves*, in the intervals of retirement and tranquillity, in the silence of the midnight watches, and, in short, whenever your mind is left free to its own spontaneous musings? Are the thoughts most familiar to your mind, at such times, thoughts of God and the things of God;—or, are they thoughts that turn upon the present world and its transient concerns? Are they confined, for the most part, within the narrow circle of time and sense; or, do they make frequent and large excursions into the spiritual and eternal world? The answer to *this* question will go far to decide whether you have, or have *not*, the love of God. It is impossible that such an object as the Divine Being should be absent long from your thoughts; impossible that *his* remembrance should long remain merged in the stream of other imaginations; unless you are supposed chargeable with a *decided indifference* to divine things! Unless you are destitute of love to God, you can never be so utterly uncongenial in sentiment and feeling with the Psalmist, when he says, "My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, while I meditate upon thee in the night watches:" "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" When that man of God gazed upon the starry heavens, his mind was not merely wrought into astonishment at the physical energy there displayed; he was still more deeply lost in grateful admiration of the mercy of Providence as manifested to *man:*—a sinful child of dust, and yet visited by God in the midst of so magnificent a universe? But when day passes after day, and night after night, without any serious thoughts of God, it is plain that He is not the *home* of your mind, not your *portion*, *centre*, and *resting-place:* and, if this is the case, it is equally plain that you are not in a state of acceptance with Him; since nothing can be more certain than that

as our thoughts are. *such* must be our *character*. I do not ask what are your thoughts at particular *times*, or under the influence of some particular *event:* there may be little difference, on some occasions, between those who remember, and those who neglect God *habitually*. The charge against the ungodly is, that "God is not in *all* their thoughts." If there are any here who feel this charge as bearing against *themselves*, let them take that solemn warning given by God himself at the close of the fiftieth Psalm: "Oh consider this, ye that *forget* God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you!"

2. Let me request you to consider seriously how you stand disposed to the *exercises of religion*. If God is the object of your love, you will gladly avail yourselves of the most favourable opportunities of cultivating a closer friendship with the Father of your spirits: on the contrary, he who feels no regard for these opportunities, proves that he has no love to God, and will never be able to establish the conviction that God is his friend. Wherever there exists a sincere friendship, opportunities of cultivating it are gladly embraced, and the opposite privations are regretted. Where an *habitual neglect* of sacred exercises prevails, it must be interpreted as if it said, like those whom the prophet describes, "Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from amongst us. Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways!" If your closets seldom witness your private devotions, if your moments in retirement are languid and uninteresting,—your religion can have no hold on your heart; and the reason why your religion has no hold on your heart, is because you have no love of God. There are some whose religion sits easy and delightful upon them; its acts and functions are free and lively; there are others who seem to bear their religion as a burthen, to drag their duties as a *chain—no vital part of themselves*, but rather a cumbrous *appendage:* this is a decisive and melancholy symptom of a heart alienated from God. There is no genuine religion, no real contact of the heart with the best of beings, unless it makes us continually resort to

Him as our *chief joy.* The Psalmist is always expressing his fervent desires after God: after the light of the divine countenance, and the sense of the divine favour: but do you suppose such desires *peculiar* to the state of believers under the *Old* Testament? *No*, my brethren; there exist more abundant reasons than ever, since the gospel of Christ has been displayed in all the glorious fulness of its blessings, why our souls should be inflamed with such feelings as those which inspired the Psalmist, when he exclaimed, "As the hart panteth for the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God!"

3. If you would ascertain whether you love God, consider how you stand affected toward the *word* of God. We can entertain no just thoughts of God, but such as we derive from his own word: we can acquire no true knowledge of God, nor cherish any suitable affections towards him, unless they are such as his own revelation authorises. Otherwise we must suppose that revelation insufficient for its specific purposes, and set the *means* against the *end.* All, therefore, who sincerely love God, are *students* of his word; they here, also, accord in soul with the Psalmist, and like him, can say, "O how I love thy word! in it is my meditation all the day:" they eat it as food for their souls, and find it *sweeter than honey.* They go to it as to an inexhaustible fountain, and drink from it streams of sacred light and joy. A neglected Bible is too unambiguous a sign of an unsanctified heart; since that blessed book cannot fail to attract every one that loves its Divine Author. How is it possible to delight in God and yet neglect *that* word which alone reveals him in his true and glorious character,—alone discovers the way by which he comes into unison with us and condescends to pardon us, to love us, and to guide us through all this mysterious state of being? It is observable, that the *only* persons who are inattentive to their own sacred books, are to be found among *christians. Mahomedans* commit large portions of the Koran to memory; the *Jews* regard the Old Testament with reverence; the *Hindoo bramins* are enthusiastically attached to their Shaster; while *christians* alone neglect

their Bible. And the reason is, that the *Scriptures* are so much more spiritual than the religious books received by others: they afford so little scope for mere amusement or self-complacency;—they place the reader *alone with God*,—they withdraw him from the things that are seen and temporal, and fix him among the things that are unseen and eternal,—they disclose to his view at once the secret evils of his own condition, and the awful purity of that Being with whom he has to do. No wonder the ungodly man hates their light, neither comes to their light, but retires from it farther and farther into the shades of guilty ignorance. How melancholy the infatuation of such a character!

4. Estimate your character in respect to your love of God, by reflecting with what sentiments you regard the *people* of God. God has a people peculiarly his own: they are *not* of that world to which they outwardly belong,—not conformed to it in the spirit of their mind; they stand apart, many of them at least, in conspicuous conformity to Jesus Christ, and earnest expectation of the glory which He has promised. How, then, do you regard these decided followers of God? Do you shun their society with aversion and secret shame; or do you enjoy their communion as one of the most delightful among your christian privileges? Are you content merely to be the companion of those who "have a *name* to live, but are dead;" or can you say with the Psalmist, "My delight is in the excellent of the earth?" or, with the beloved disciple, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren?" for, as he adds, "He that loveth him that begot, loveth him that is begotten;" if you do not love the *image* which you have *seen*, how can you love the *unseen* original? If the features of holiness and grace in the *creature* are not attractive to your view, how can your affections rise to the perfect *essence?* How can you ascend to the very *Sun* itself, when you cannot enjoy even the faint *reflection* of its glory? He who knew the heart, could alone say to those around him, "I *know you*, that ye have not the love of God in you:" but though none can address

you now in the same tone of divine authority, yet you may hear it uttered by a voice within—the voice of your own conscience: you may know, without any perturbations of hope or fear, by the spiritual insensibility and inaction of your soul,—by *this* you may know, with equal certainty as by a voice from heaven, that *you have not the love of God in you!*

5. Consider the disposition you entertain toward the person and office of the *Son of God.* "If ye had loved the Father, ye would have loved me also," was the constant argument of Jesus Christ to those Pharisees whom he addresses in the text. For Jesus Christ is the express *image* of God; the effulgence of the divine character is attempered in *him*, to suit the view of sinful humanity. In the life of Jesus Christ, we see how the Divine Being conducts himself in human form and in our own circumstances: we behold how he bears all the sorrows, and passes through all the temptations, of flesh and blood. Such, indeed, is the identity, so perfect the *oneness* of character, between the *man Christ Jesus* and the *Divine Being*,—that our Saviour expressly assures us "He that hath seen *me*, hath seen the *Father;* I and my Father are *one*." The purpose for which God was manifested in the flesh was, not to reveal high speculations concerning the nature of the Deity: it was to *bear* our sorrows, and to *die* for our sins. But can *you* contemplate Him, thus stooping to your condition, thus *mingling* with every interest of *your own*, and not be *moved* by such a spectacle?—not be *attracted*, *fixed* filled with grateful astonishment and devotion,—crucified, as it were, on the cross of Christ, to the flesh, and to the world? What mark, then, of our possessing no love of *God* can equal this, that we are without love to *Jesus Christ?*—that neither the *visibility* of his divine excellence, nor his *participation* of all our human sufferings, can reach our hearts, and command our affections?

6. In examining whether you love God, examine how you are affected by his *benefits*. *These* are so numerous and so distinguished, that they ought to excite our most ardent gratitude; night and day they are experienced by

us; they pervade every moment of our being. We know that favours from an *enemy* derive a *taint* from the hands through which they are received, and excite alienation rather than attachment: but the kindness of a *friend*, by constantly reminding us of himself, endears that friend more and more to our hearts; and thus, he that has no love to God receives all his favours without the least attraction toward their Author, whom he regards rather as his enemy than his friend. But the christian feels his love of God excited by every fresh instance of his goodness. The mercies of God have accompanied you through every stage of your journey; and they are exhibited to you in his word as stretching through a vast eternity. Are *these* the *only* benefits you can receive without gratitude, and suffer to pass unregarded? *How*, then, can any love of God dwell in your bosom?

7. Consider, in the next place, in what manner you are impressed by the sense of your *sins*. The question is *not* whether you *have* any sins,—none can admit a doubt on this point; the only inquiry is, how you are affected by those sins? Are they remembered by you with a sentiment of *tender regret*, of *deep confusion and humiliation*, that you should ever have *so* requited such infinite goodness? And is this sentiment combined with a *sacred resolution to go and sin no more*,—to *devote* yourself to the service of your Divine Benefactor? If you can live without an habitual sense of penitential tenderness and reverential fear be assured you cannot love God; you have no experience of those scripture declarations—" *They shall* FEAR *the Lord and his goodness in the latter days:*" " *There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be* FEARED:" you know not yet that " *the goodness of God leadeth to repentance.*" If the mind is softened by the love of God, all his favours serve to inflame its gratitude, and confirm its devotion to his will: but he who has no love of God in his soul, thinks of nothing but how he may *escape* from God's hand, and selfishly devours all his favours without an emotion of gratitude to the Giver.

8. Finally, let me remind you to consider how you

are affected to the *present world.* If you could only be exempt from its afflictions, would you wish it to be your *lasting* home? If you could surround yourself with all its advantages and enjoyments, would you be content to dwell in it for ever? Yet you know that it is a place of separation and exile from the Divine Majesty;—that it is a scene of darkness, in comparison with heaven, very faintly illuminated with the beams of his distant glory;—that its inhabitant is constrained to say, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but mine eye hath *not* yet *seen* thee;"—while *heaven* is the proper dwelling-place of God and his people! Could you then consent to remain here always, without ever *seeing as you are seen,—seeing light in his light,*—without ever *beholding his glory*; without ever drinking at the fountain, and basking in *that presence which is fulness of joy, and life for evermore?* always to remain *immersed* in the shadows of time—entombed in its corruptible possessions—*never* to ascend up on high to God and Christ and the glories of the eternal world! If such is the state of your spirit, you want the essential principle of a christian—you want the love of God. The genuine christian, the lover of God, is certain to feel himself a "*stranger on the earth.*" No splendour, no emolument of this world,—not all the fascinations of sensual pleasure,—can detain his heart below the skies, or keep him from sympathizing with the sentiment of the Psalmist: "*As for me I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I wake in thy likeness.*" I do not ask whether you have, at present, "*a desire to depart:*" perhaps you may not be as yet sufficiently prepared and established to entertain so exalted a desire; but still, if you have received a *new* heart, you will deprecate nothing so much as having your portion in *this* life,—as having your eternal abode on *earth.* It is the character of faith to dwell much in eternity: the apostle says, in the name of all real believers, "*We look not at the things that are seen, but the things that are not seen: for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.*"

II. And now, my brethren, supposing the preceding remarks to have produced in any of you the conviction *that you have not the love of God in you*, permit me very briefly to point out the proper *improvement* of such a conviction.

1. First, it should be accompanied with deep *humiliation.* If you laboured under the privation of some bodily organ, requisite to the discharge of an animal function, you would feel it as in some degree a humiliating circumstance; but what would be any defect of this kind, however serious, in comparison of that *great want* under which you labour—the want of piety, the calamity of *a soul estranged from the love of God!* What are all other subjects of humiliation, compared with *this*—a *moral fall*, a *spiritual death in sin:* and this, unless it be removed, the sure precursor of the *second death—eternal ruin!* "*This is a lamentation indeed, and it shall be for a lamentation.*"

Suppose the children of a family, reared and provided for by the most affectionate of parents, to rise up in rebellion against their father, and cast off all the feelings of filial tenderness and respect; would any qualities those children might possess, any *appearances* of virtue they might exhibit in other respects, compensate for such an unnatural, such an awful deformity of character? Transfer this representation to your conduct in relation to God: "If I," says he, "am a *father*, where is my fear? if I am a *master*, where is my honour?" "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me: the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

2. And let your humiliation be accompanied with *concern and alarm.* To be alienated from the Great Origin of being; to be severed, or to sever yourself from the essential Author and element of all felicity, must be a calamity which none can understand, an infinite woe which none can measure or conceive! If the stream is cut off from the fountain, it soon ceases to flow, and its waters are dissipated in the air; and if the soul is cut

off from *God*, it *dies !* Its *vital contact* with God,—its spiritual union with the Father of Spirits through the blessed Mediator, is the only life and beauty of the immortal soul. All, without this, are *dead*—"*dead in trespasses and sins !*" A living death—a state of restless wanderings, and unsatisfied desires ! What a condition theirs ! And, oh ! what a prospect for such, when they look beyond this world ! Who will give them a welcome when they enter an eternal state ? What reception will they meet with, and where ? What consolation amidst their loss and their sufferings, but that of the fellow-sufferers, plunged in the same abyss of ruin ? Impenitent sinners are *allied* to evil spirits ; they have an *affinity* with the kingdom of darkness ; and when they die, they are emphatically said to "*go to* THEIR OWN *place !*"

3. This is an *awful* state for any to be in at present ; but, blessed be God, it is not yet a *hopeless* situation. Let no person say, "I find by what I have heard, that I do not love God, and, therefore I can entertain no hope." There is a way of return and recovery open to all. Jesus Christ, my dear brethren, proclaims to you all, "I am the way. No man can come to the Father but by me :"—but every one that will may come by this new and living way ; and, if you lose life eternal, you lose it because,—according to his words just before the text,—because "you *will* not come to Christ that you may have life." If you feel the misery, deformity, and danger of your state, then listen to his invitation, and embrace his promise. See the whole weight of your guilt transferred to his cross ! See how God can be at once the just and the justifier ! Take of the blood of sprinkling, and be at peace ! *His blood cleanseth from all sin:* He will send that Spirit into your heart, which will manifest him to you ; and where that Spirit is, *there* is *liberty* and holy love. *He* is the *mystical* ladder, let down from heaven to earth, on which angels are continually ascending and descending, in token of an alliance established between God and man. United by faith to Jesus Christ, you shall become *a habitation of God through the Spirit:* the Father will make you a

partaker of his *love*, the Son of his *grace*, angels of their *friendship:* and you shall be preserved, and progressively sanctified; until, by the last change, all remains of the grand epidemic source of evils shall be for ever removed from your soul; and the *love of God shall constitute your eternal felicity.*

XVII.

THE JOY OF ANGELS OVER A REPENTING SINNER.*

[PREACHED AT BROADMEAD, BRISTOL, SUNDAY EVENING, AUGUST 22, 1824.]

LUKE XV. 7.—*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.*

THE ministry of our Lord was exercised, and his success obtained, principally among the lower classes of mankind. We read that, in opposition to the supercilious contempt of the Pharisees and rulers, "the common people heard him gladly:" the ancient prediction being thus verified, that, "to the poor the gospel should be preached." Accordingly, Jesus Christ, adapting the style of his preaching to the state of his hearers, borrowed many familiar illustrations of the truths he taught from the scenes of nature and from the occupations of ordinary life, and generally used the parabolic mode of instruction: yet his illustrations were always delivered in a manner consistent with the dignity of his doctrine and character, and they tended to show that his religion is perfectly adapted to make all mankind wise unto salvation.

The proud Pharisees took offence at this attention of our Saviour to the common people, and urged it as an objection against him that he received sinners and ate with them. Our Saviour replied to their objection by

* Printed from the notes of the Rev. Thomas Grinfield.

supposing the case of a shepherd, who, if he had lost a single sheep of his flock, would immediately leave all the rest, that he might recover that *one ;* and, having recovered it, would feel a greater degree of satisfaction than the possession of all the rest could bestow. After this comparison, our Lord descended to another yet more humble, which could have occurred to no person that was not more conversant with cottages than courts; the comparison of the poor woman that, on the recovery of one lost piece of silver, would be filled with a joy which she could not forbear inviting her neighbours to participate. From these familiar images Jesus Christ lifts our imagination at once to heaven itself; assuring us that, in a similar manner, "*Joy shall be in heaven, joy among the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth,*" and this a "*greater joy than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.*"

In endeavouring to unfold this passage for our mutual advantage, I propose to consider, briefly, the four following subjects of inquiry; first, where we are to look for these ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance; secondly, why the event of one sinner's repentance should fill the angels with joy; thirdly, why this joy should be greater than that with which they contemplate so large a number of righteous persons; and, fourthly, why the seat of this should be placed in heaven; after which, in the last place, I shall conclude with a brief improvement.

1. The first point of inquiry is, Where are we to find these ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance? The forerunner of Jesus Christ came preaching the doctrine of repentance; and Jesus Christ himself repeated that doctrine, saying to all, *Except ye repent ye shall perish.* When he sent forth his apostles, he taught them to circulate, wherever they went, the solemn admonition, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is come unto you.* They constantly inculcated repentance as universally necessary; *Now*, said they, *God commandeth all men every where to repent.* Yet the text makes mention of ninety-nine persons who *need no* repentance. Where then are

we to find these? Two solutions have been proposed; each in itself appears satisfactory, but each must be taken separately: proceeding on different grounds, they are not capable of being combined.

First, the persons concerned have been supposed to be persons who have already repented. Divines are accustomed to divide all persons into three states of character,—as careless sinners, awakened penitents, or confirmed believers. The persons in question, who need no repentance, are supposed to have passed through the two former of these states of character, and to be now in the third; they are neither careless sinners, nor penitents newly awakened to a sense of guilt—they are confirmed believers; and they need no repentance, no entire change of their hearts, simply because they have already experienced it: as the apostle exhorts the Hebrews, they *go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance.* It is not intended to convey an idea that they have not daily sins to call for daily penitence, but merely that, having once been effectually convinced of sin, and converted to God by a true repentance, they may justly be said not to need that change any more. There is nothing unnatural or improper in this interpretation: there are many such persons, it is to be hoped, in every christian society: many who, having passed through that mysterious and vital process of divine influence on the soul, which we call repentance, cannot, strictly speaking, experience or require it a second time.

The other solution is, that Jesus Christ is here speaking hypothetically; that he makes a supposition, which has no existence in reality, merely for the sake of argument. No doubt many instances of such suppositions occur in the discourses of our Saviour. It is a mode of statement which exactly concurs with another part of the parables contained in the same chapter: I refer to the character of the elder son. Is there any individual to be found, either in the christian profession, or in civil life, who exhibits the archetype of that elder son?---any one to whom the Father could with propriety say, "Son, thou hast been always with me, and all that I have is

thine?" I am aware that the conduct of the Pharisees has been generally considered to be represented by that of the elder son: this may be true; yet it is evident the Pharisees are here represented not such as they really were, but such as they vainly imagined themselves to be. In strict reality, nothing could be more unlike than the original and the picture: our Saviour, to enforce his illustration, gave them credit for their pretensions to righteousness; but nothing could be more remote from the real character of those, before whom even *the publicans and harlots* would enter into the kingdom of heaven. After the same manner of speaking, it has been supposed, Jesus Christ here introduces the idea of ninety-nine righteous persons; no real persons were designed by the expression; he used it merely for the purpose of assailing the arrogant conclusions of the Pharisees respecting themselves: supposing them to be of such faultless character, still, argues our Lord, the spectacle of one penitent sinner would inspire greater joy in the hearts of heavenly beings than the spectacle of ninety-nine such persons.

3. The second inquiry is, Why this spectacle should have such an effect on heavenly beings, and particularly on angels? One might have thought it more probable that no event on earth, at least none in which one individual alone was concerned, would have any effect on beings of so elevated an order; that such an occurrence would not even be known in the celestial court; still less that it would occasion an increase of joy in those abodes of eternal blessedness. But revelation has withdrawn the veil from the invisible world, and opened a communication between earth and heaven. It exhibits to us an order of holy and glorious beings, denominated angels; and these are represented as instruments employed in executing the divine purposes respecting man; they are Christ's angels; they take a deep concern in the success of his church, and the gathering in of his redeemed: *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that are heirs of salvation?* In one passage, indeed, though somewhat obscure, the apostle

Paul seems to insinuate that angels are invisibly present in the solemn assemblies of the faithful.* Though their interference in the affairs of the church is now silent and unperceived, there is no reason to suppose it to be withdrawn, or less real than when it used to be accompanied with the splendour of miraculous circumstances; any more than there is reason to believe those infernal spirits, against whose temptations we are so often warned, to be now no longer awake and active against us. Heavenly beings are witnesses of these assemblies; they listen to the ministry of sacred truth; they anxiously trace its effects on the consciences and hearts of men; and, when ever a salutary impression is produced, whenever the conscience is convinced, and the heart opened to repentance, they bear the glad tidings to their companions in felicity, and *then is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.* Do you ask, why they are thus rejoiced by such an event? For the same reasons, I reply, that the most pious among men are accustomed to rejoice when they hear of the conversion of a sinner to God. Such a change brings, they are sensible, a new servant to their Lord; it is the accession of a new member to that great society of which God and his Christ are the head: and none can be a sincere, loyal subject of the King of kings without wishing his laws to be obeyed, his kingdom to be extended; because the glory of the Redeemer is realized in the multitude of the redeemed. Besides which, the benevolence of angels is proportioned to their elevation in wisdom and holiness: they approximate, far nearer than the most exalted of the saints, to the unlimited benevolence of the divine character. God is love, and angels are emanations of that Divine Spirit: no taint of selfishness mingles with their feelings and their views: they see distinctly the connexion that subsists between repentance and happiness: they see that when the sinner repents, he *first comes to himself*—he takes the first step in that progress which tends toward their own ineffable felicity—he enters on that way in which God

* 1 Cor. xi. 10.

is to be found: while impenitence endangers the eternal welfare of the soul, threatens its forfeiture of immortal happiness, its subjection to irreparable misery. It cannot be but that the repentance of a sinner, regarded as it is by angels as the birth-day of a new existence, the precursor of immortality, the embryo of endless bliss, the introduction to the element of perfect peace and rest, the vestibule of heaven,—it cannot but be that this should communicate delight to those holy and benevolent spirits.

The Scriptures clearly reveal to us, whether or not you believe the doctrine, that there exist in this world two great kingdoms; at the head of one of which kingdoms is Jesus Christ, at the head of the other, Satan; and that all mankind, without exception, are the subjects either of the one or the other of these mighty opposite empires. Now, repentance is the line of demarcation betwixt the two; it is that which marks the confines of light and darkness,—of the heavenly and the infernal state. From the moment a sinner truly repents, he makes a transition from death to life, spiritual and eternal: from that moment Satan loses a vassal, and Jesus Christ gains a servant. It is impossible for beings such as angels to remain indifferent spectators of such an event; impossible for them not to feel joy when they see the balance changed in favour of their own cause. Victory and gain, in every instance, are attended with feelings of joy; but no spoil can be deemed precious, no deliverance worthy of triumph and exultation, in comparison with that which is achieved when repentance finds place in the heart of a human being!

3. In the third place, it is natural to ask, Why the joy entertained by angels, on occasion of a single penitent's recovery, should be greater than the joy they derive from the spectacle of ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance? It must be confessed that the amount of good enjoyed by the ninety-nine righteous persons, is intrinsically greater than that which can be supposed to be enjoyed by a single penitent. Theirs, besides its being diffused among ninety-nine persons, is

a confirmed and advanced state of happiness; whereas his is merely the first commencement, the embryo of happiness, and this merely in one individual. *How* then, it may be asked, can the degree of joy excited in the breasts of angels by the repentance of a single sinner, be justly represented as greater than that which is excited by the view of ninety-nine persons who continue to enjoy a state of far more established and exalted felicity? In answer to this, let it be observed, that, in all probability, it is the prerogative of the Deity alone to be affected by things according to their real, absolute magnitude and importance, without the smallest regard to the circumstance of time, without receiving any deeper impression from an occurrence because it is of recent date; it is probable that it is only in His infinite intellect that all things appear in their essential nature, without the difference of impression which arises to our minds from an event being more or less distant in respect to time: "a thousand years are as one day, and one day is as a thousand years, with the Lord;" *His* mind being omnipresent in immensity, and grasping all things as in a point. But beings whose perceptions are progressive, as the perceptions of all finite beings must be, are necessarily more powerfully influenced by a recent event than by one that has long past; for a time it occupies and engrosses their whole attention, and swells upon their view far beyond its natural dimensions. Now angels are finite beings; they are affected as such, in their sensations, by the proximity and distance of objects; and, if they are thus affected in their sensations, they must be similarly influenced in their sympathies, since proportionate sympathies always follow sensations.

The penitent sinner has enter upon a new existence,—he has commenced an entirely new course of feeling, thought, and action; and he is yet, when he ceases to be a penitent, to pass into the new and more advanced character of one who delights in God. Angels are affected, like ourselves, by the extraordinary and astonishing change that has taken place. They behold one who has made an eternal transition from death unto life—one

who has turned his back on the kingdom of darkness for ever, and set his face toward the light of God; who has begun his march from the land of his captivity toward the heavenly Canaan; who has chosen God for his portion, Christ for his Lord, saints and angels for his friends and society; who is *come to mount Sion, the city of the living God*, to their own society and that of the redeemed—to the presence of God! He has obtained a new mind, a new heart; which, instead of being *a nest of vipers, a cage of unclean birds*, is become *a temple of the Holy Spirit*, filled with divine inspirations and acceptable devotions! Can we wonder that such a change should deeply affect the highest order of finite minds, and cause the angels of God to exclaim with rapture, *This our brother was dead and is alive; he was lost, and is found?* If all are unrighteous,---if all are by nature dead in sin and condemnation,---if there is no escape without repentance,---then repentance must be of all things the most essential to a sinner; and such it is expressly declared by Him who said, *Except ye repent, ye shall all perish!*

But why, you ask, is the joy greater for the repentance of one sinner than for the perseverance of ninety-nine saints? The ninety-nine righteous persons only stand where they stood before; or rather, they only go on in the same path in which they had long walked; the only change they can experience is an accretion, an augmentation of the principles and blessings in which they were already confirmed; there is no abrupt and surprising revolution, no essential change; but the first conversion of a sinner to God is an event never to be forgotten; it is an æra in eternity, it is registered in heaven!

4. The fourth and last point of inquiry is, the reason why Christ places the scene of this joy in heaven. The repentance of a sinner is a subject of joy on earth; of joy to the faithful minister who has been perhaps the honoured instrument of producing the change; as the apostle Paul, addressing the converts of his ministry says, *What is our joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of the Lord?* Or, as the beloved disciple

says, *I have no greater joy than to see my children walk in the truth.* There is joy in the christian church on every accession of new converts; these, if genuine, constitute the true adornment of every christian society; in these its real prosperity consists: and melancholy is the state of that church, however externally prosperous, which does not value and desire the increase of its sincere penitents far above every other sign of its prosperity! But when it is said that *there is joy in heaven over every repenting sinner*, the assertion is to be understood in a meaning far more just and adequate. Repentance is there weighed in other scales than here. Angels view the change that is effected in a sinner's position before God, by repentance from higher ground,—in all its aspects and dimensions, in all its bearings and consequences. They appreciate the greatness of that happiness which their fallen brethren have lost for ever, which they themselves enjoy, and which is now in reserve for the converted sinner. They taste the joy which is set before him; they dwell in the glory which is become the object of his desires; they *know* that whatever may be his present sufferings, they are light and merely for a moment,—they will ere long be exchanged for unspeakable pleasures,—he will have *all his tears wiped away by* God himself! Angels penetrate far deeper than it is in the power of the most exalted saints on earth to penetrate; *the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths*, of that eternity, which is the seal and crown of the felicity promised to every real penitent, which stamps it an eternal felicity,—even *eternal life, the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* They have long been engaged in contemplating the beauty of that holiness which dwells in God as its original; they have long enjoyed him as their portion, as their all; they have been exploring the true fountain of happiness through a long succession of ages, and they find it still as fresh and inexhaustable as ever; they have long basked in the beatific splendours of uncreated light! They comprehend the mysterious and undefinable value of the soul; its intense susceptibilities as a rational, moral accountable

substance, incapable alike of extinction and unconsciousness through infinite duration: these things are clear to their view, though they are obscure and confused to us, who *are of yesterday and know nothing*,—to us who are *crushed before the moth.*

5. In the last place, let me attempt a brief improvement of the subject which has now been presented. And, first, we may hence perceive the very great dignity and importance which attaches to the christian ministry. This, is, beyond all doubt, the highest, the most sublime and sacred employment in which the sons of men can be engaged. Its greatness, however, arises not from any circumstances of a secular kind, not from any worldly splendour but from its purely spiritual character,—from its immediate bearing on human salvation. That salvation, in all its parts, is entirely the work and gift of God; but in this, as in his own works, he employs created instruments; and the chief instruments by whose medium salvation is communicated,—by whose operation the great change of repentance and conversion is effected,—are the ministers of the gospel. The object they habitually have in view, as preachers of the word, is to persuade men to lay down the arms of their unnatural and guilty rebellion and enter into the covenant of a merciful God: they stand as the commissioned *ambassadors of Christ:* their ministry is expressly a ministry of repentance and reconciliation *through the blood of the cross;* and it is powerful, in every instance, either as *a savour of life unto life or of death unto death.* It is an awful reflection, that *if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost;* that we are called *a sweet savour of Christ unto God, in them that are saved and in them that perish!* It may well make us ready to sink under the weight of our responsibility, while we exclaim with the apostle, *Who is sufficient for these things?* Oh, how anxious should this reflection make us, to whom this ministry is committed, that the blood of immortal souls may not be charged against us; since the word we deliver cannot return void to Him that sent it, but must accomplish, in every case, its destined purpose; issuing either in the

accumulation of guilt, or the increase of grace, to every one who hears it! And repentance, let it be remembered necessary as it is to salvation, is taught alone by the gospel; it is only to be learned in the school of Christ. Philosophy knew nothing of repentance toward God, any more than of faith in Jesus Christ; it excited no salutary alarm in the conscience; it opened no view of the terrors of a righteous God. It is the gospel that has first done this; it has awakened a fear which becomes its own cure, and has first taught the sinner to cry out, *What shall I do to be saved?* The gospel has withdrawn the dark veil of nature's ignorance which hid God from our view, at the same time that it has *brought life and immortality to light in Jesus Christ!* If it fail to lead you to repentance it fails of every thing for which it was designed; when He who had *the keys of death and hell* in his hand, could employ no stronger motive to repentance than that which he employs in assuring us, *If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall* DIE IN YOUR SINS!—*Ye shall* DIE IN YOUR SINS! But Jesus Christ, my brethren, came expressly to save you from this dreadful destiny; he came down from heaven to *give life unto the world;* to quicken those that were *dead in trespasses and sins;* and He is now *exalted as a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance as well as remission of sins;*—a repentance unto life never to be repented of! There is enough here, surely, to awaken both your fear and your gratitude; to excite both a sense of the value of your soul, and a sense of the love of your Saviour. And these are motives peculiar to the gospel: to these motives it owes all its triumphs over the hearts of men; it is the gospel of your salvation; and well might it be ushered into the world by angelic beings with that annunciation, *Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth! Good-will towards men!*

2. In the second and last place, it is not necessary to collect motives to repentance from the Scriptures; the text alone is sufficient to show its importance: the simple fact, recorded in the text, is itself equivalent to a host of arguments—the fact that the only, or at least the chief

event on earth, which excites joy in heaven, in the mind of God and of the holy angels, is---the repentance of a sinner! The barrier that separates eternity from time is impassable; the world beyond the grave is enveloped in utter obscurity. Had not revelation broken the silence of nature, never should we have known that a single event, which takes place in the present scene, is noticed in heaven: but now we are informed that there are occurrences on earth which excite deep attention and emotion in that higher world; and what are these? We are assured by the text that it is not the advancement of knowledge and civilization, not the splendours of art, nor the extension of empires and commerce, that attract the regard of those celestial intelligences; they are interested by objects of a very different description; they *rejoice over one sinner that repenteth!* The repentance of one solitary sinner, his conversion from the error of his way, has greater charms in the view of angels than even the spectacle of their own happy society, or that of all those saints on earth who persevere in pursuing the way to life eternal. And if the mere contemplation of this change is so sweet to angels in heaven, oh, how sweet must the experience itself be to the penitent!---for he it is who *tastes that the Lord is gracious*---who tastes the unspeakable comfort that arises from the pardon of his sins and peace with God; he it is who goes on from strength to strength, from smaller to larger discoveries of the blessings that are in God and his Christ; he it is that *comes to God, comes to Jesus the mediator, and to the blood of sprinkling; to the general assembly and church of the first-born: to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to an innumerable company of angels.* Hence none ever experienced this change indeed, who did not consider it far above every other event of his life: he may have experienced many other changes, and some of a very pleasing kind; he may have passed from a state of poverty and hardship to a situation of affluence and every earthly comfort; or he may have been raised up from a bed of pain and sickness to the enjoyment of ease and health; but, if he is a true christian, if he has ever been

a true penitent, his conversion is an event that can never lose its importance in his regard; the season of his first repentance is an æra in the records of his memory; it must always appear as a brilliant spot in his retrospect; it hallows the place and the hour that witnessed it; it lays him under a deeper, a more sacred obligation to the minister or the friend that was the honoured instrument of producing it, than he can entertain towards any inferior benefactor. And well it may; for it is a change of which the happy consequences shall endure for ever: all other benefits are temporal and transient; this alone is eternal; its value will be just as great when thousands of ages shall have passed away as it was at the first moment. Do you suppose those penitents, who occasioned this joy in heaven at the first preaching of the gospel, have found any abatement in their happiness by the lapse of eighteen centuries? No, my brethren! that happiness is just as fresh as on the day when they first *entered into the joy of their Lord.* The experience of eternity has rather increased than diminished its value. It is repentance that changes the whole aspect of things, whether present or future. The conviction that we have repented, that we have experienced that real, vital conversion which places us in a state of friendship with the Author of our being---this conviction lightens all afflictions, brightens every prospect, gives peace in the hour of death, and, at the last day,---amidst the wreck of elements, amidst the dissolution of the material heavens and earth,---the spark of celestial immortality that was first kindled in repentance, will emerge from the darkness of the sepulchre, and shine for ever in *the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness!* Ah, my brethren! the time is coming, and may be very near, when you will have nothing left to do, but to lay down your head on your death-bed pillow; and then, it is probable, if not before, yet then, you will begin to feel the force of what has now been suggested on the subject of repentance. In that hour the least apprehension that you are a real penitent,---the faintest hope that you have laid hold on Christ with a true heart,---will

give you far more satisfaction than any event that ever occurred to your attention. Oh, then, let none dismiss this subject with indifference: let none have listened to this discourse without being prevailed upon to retire this evening, and in the stillness of his chamber, and the solitude of his soul, to pour forth a fervent, importunate prayer, that he may be numbered among those penitent sinners who here occasion joy in heaven, and who will hereafter obtain eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

XVIII.

NATURE AND DANGER OF EVIL COMMUNICATIONS.

[PREACHED AT CAMBRIDGE, IN AUGUST, 1824.]

1 Cor. xv. 33.—*Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners.**

This passage is taken from a heathen poet, Menander, and shows that Paul was not unacquainted with the literature of the pagan world. By this he was peculiarly fitted for some parts of his work, being destined to bear the name of Christ before princes, magistrates, and philosophers, especially in the Roman and Grecian parts of the earth. The maxim accords with universal experience, and was worthy, therefore, of being adopted as a portion of those records of eternal truth, which are to be the guide of mankind in all succeeding ages.

The connexion is not that in which we should have expected such a maxim to be inserted, it is in the midst of a very affecting and instructive view of the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting; but the occasion of it was this: the Corinthians had received, from the intrusion of false teachers, principles which militated against that great doctrine. They had been taught to

* This sermon has been prepared by collating and blending the notes of the Hon. Mr. Baron Gurney with those of Joshua Wilson, Esq.

explain it away, and to resolve it merely into a moral process which takes place in the present world; interpreting what is said of the resurrection of the dead in a mystical and figurative manner. The apostle insinuates, that it was by a mixture of the corrupt communications of these men with the christian church, and the intimate contact into which they had permitted themselves to come with them, that they had been led off from the fundamental doctrine of the gospel, and rejected a primary part of the apostolic testimony. "For if there be no resurrection of the dead, then," as he observed, "is Christ not risen, and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins."*

We see, that notwithstanding the apostle had planted pure christianity among the Corinthians, and had confirmed it by the most extraordinary miracles and supernatural operations; yet such was the contagion of evil example and corrupt communication, that the members of the Corinthian church, in a very short time, departed from the fundamental articles of the truth, as it is in Jesus Christ; and hence we may learn the importance, nay, the necessity, of being on our guard in this respect, and of avoiding such confidence in ourselves as might induce us to neglect the caution here so forcibly expressed. "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners."

Among the first things accomplished by our blessed Lord after his ascension, was the organization of the christian churches by his word and Spirit through the instrumentality of his apostles. These he placed under suitable laws, appointing proper officers, and regulating them by the simple maxims of mutual love, forbearance, and charity: and no doubt the great design which he had in thus forming christian churches was to furnish room for the cultivation of a social spirit, without that danger of infection which would spring from it in a world abounding with evil examples, and actuated by

* 1 Cor. xv. 13, 14, 17.

evil maxims. Knowing that man is naturally a social creature, and prone to unite with his kind, he was pleased to form a select society, wherein the exercise of the social affections might tend to the purification of the heart, the sanctification of the character, and the perfecting of man in the image of God and the Redeemer. A principle of action so efficacious as that of the social affections, by which men are perpetually assimilating themselves to one another, was not to be neglected by the great founder of our religion. He has consecrated it in the formation of christian churches, and thus erected the strongest rampart against the incursions of evil example, and the influence of a "world that lieth in wickedness."

In considering these words, there are three things to which I would request your serious attention:

In the first place, I shall state what those communications are which may be termed "evil."

Secondly, Explain the way in which they operate so as to "corrupt good manners:" and

Thirdly, Shall endeavour to enforce the warning, or exhortation, insinuated or comprehended in the passage, "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners."

I. It will be natural to inquire, What are "evil communications?" It is plainly impossible, in the present state of the world, entirely to avoid intercourse with bad men; this would be, as the apostle himself observed, "to go out of the world." "I write unto you," said he, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, "not to company with fornicators; howbeit, not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world: but now I have written to you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat."* The intercourse of society must be main-

* 1 Cor. v. 10, 11.

tained, without respect to the characters of men, to such an extent as the business of life requires. No one can possibly avoid occasional intercourse with those with whom habitual communications would be in the highest degree dangerous. If he is led into such society by the demands of his calling, the very necessity of going into it, in distinction from his choice of it, will excite a degree of caution well calculated to counteract the contagion; and, being in the path of duty, such a person may expect to be upheld by the succours of divine grace, which are never withheld from those who commit themselves to the guidance of God. An unsocial spirit, that would lead us, like the Essenes of old, into the solitudes of the wilderness, and to desert the active stations of human society, though it would be accompanied with the advantage of being entirely exempted from evil example, would be utterly inconsistent with the genius of christianity, and the example of our great Lord. But still, we must not, under pretence of yielding to the necessary calls of business, cultivate and cherish that "evil communication" which is here said to "corrupt good manners."

1. Now, in the first place, that communication may be justly regarded evil, in the highest sense, which is corrupt in relation to its immediate tendency to taint the purity of the mind by associations of a lascivious and sensual nature. That conversation which is calculated to bring before the mind images of indelicacy and impurity, which owes its zest and force to the power of such associations, and is adapted to familiarize the thoughts to that from which a pure and chaste imagination recoils, must be considered in the highest degree of this kind; and how large a proportion of many societies owe their attraction almost entirely to this ingredient! The real christian will never, for a moment, put himself, voluntarily, into a society where this contagion prevails; and will take the earliest opportunity of escaping from it, if by accident he is thrown into such company.

2. But, short of this, that may be denominated evil communication where the parties are of such a character

that religion is not adverted to, or thought of in a serious or practical manner, where it has no hold upon the mind, where the fear of God is evidently dismissed, and there is no scriptural rule of action.

The mere absence of religion is sufficient to constitute that evil communication against which we are guarded. Those persons whose conversation is not plainly vicious, but who appear to have no true fear of God, no regard to the obligations of religion, who evidently live "without God in the world," without any habitual reference to a future state, must be considered as constituting a class of characters, with which he who earnestly seeks his salvation will not voluntarily come into contact. It is not to be supposed that the christian can always select, even as the associates of his confidential hours, those who are partakers of divine grace, those who are really converted to God; though, as far as possible, it will be his wisdom to select such, and such only: yet it is not too much to say, that he should avoid, as much as possible, any intimate connexion with those who appear to be not at all influenced by the considerations of religion, and seem entirely strangers to its hopes, fears, restraints, and prohibitions; though their conduct may be in other respects unexceptionable and inoffensive.

3. It is almost unnecessary to observe, that is an evil communication, in a high degree, which abounds with objections to christianity, and is calculated to produce a doubt, either of its divine origin, or of the certainty of its most important truths. He who wishes to have his faith confirmed in the evidence of christianity, will never form an intimacy with those who are opposed to that evidence; who have thrown off the restraints of religion, renounced allegiance to the Saviour, and adopted the loose and sceptical doctrines of a licentious age.

4. And to this class we may add those who have discarded the peculiar doctrines of christianity, and who are envenomed with an antipathy to them, so as to be desirous, on all occasions, to multiply proselytes, by winning men to their own persuasion in regard to the distinctive points in which they are at variance with real

christians of all ages. Such as have endeavoured to corrupt the fundamental principles of christianity must, in the esteem of persons who hold those principles sacred, be regarded as tempting to "evil communications." To this caution we are led by the context; for those who corrupted the faith of the Corinthians were not such as had rejected christianity altogether, not such as had entirely relapsed into heathenism or Judaism, but those who had denied the fundamental testimony of the apostles, contradicted the primary truths of christianity, and introduced another and different gospel from that which the apostles had promulgated. The apostle John lays down an injunction on this subject, which must be regarded as still in force: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God; he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed."* We are not to encourage an intercourse of a voluntary kind with them, nor place ourselves under their influence: for that influence must be considered as antichristian in proportion as such persons have deviated from the fundamental doctrines which are taught in christianity.

5. They whose moral principles are loose, with respect to the great obligations of justice and equity, who indulge themselves in dishonourable practices, who propagate loose and licentious maxims with regard to the mode of conducting business, who acknowledge themselves to be ready to take any advantages, and are restrained by no other consideration than the penalty of the law, who are ready to sacrifice principle and conscience to filthy lucre, must be considered as a source of evil communication, against which we are here expressly warned.

II. But I proceed, in the next place, briefly to point out the way in which "evil communication" operates in corrupting "good manners."

* 2 John, ver. 9, 10.

You know very well, my brethren, that the order of the natural world is maintained by the operation of matter upon matter; and that the order of the moral world is maintained by the action of mind upon mind. As the great revolutions of nature are carried on by the reciprocal action of the various parts of which the visible universe consists, upon each other, whether of smaller portions or of greater masses; so that mysterious order which the Divine Being maintains in the moral world is upheld and preserved by the mutual action of one mind upon another. This action is incessantly going on; and though it borrows for its instrumentality the organs of the body, yet the ultimate object is mind. The great medium through which this is maintained is the intercourse and conversation of man with man, which brings one mind into contact with another, and is perpetually modifying the mind which is thus drawn into union, and derives modification from that mind with which it converses. We are continually drawing and being drawn, impelling and resisting or yielding, assimilating ourselves to others and others to ourselves; nor is it possible to go into any company and come from it exactly in the same state of mind. The moral modification is perpetually going on; and, if we trace it exactly, we shall find that it is either evil or good; very seldom, if ever, entirely indifferent or neutral. It is one of the fundamental laws of nature, that our minds should be subject to perpetual modification from the minds of others; nor is it within the reach of our will to determine whether this influence shall be exercised or not. Yet we may determine to what influence we subject it; we may determine what society we will keep, but not what influence that society which we choose shall have upon us. It operates according to certain fixed and infallible laws, so that no person can, by any pretence of self-control, justify exposing himself to the action of a power, the operation of which is determined by laws quite independent of himself.

One of the first feelings of every person who goes into company is, to please and be pleased. If he be a per-

son of a benevolent and social spirit, he goes with the very design of assimilating his mind, as much as possible, to the minds of those with whom he converses. This is a silent compact, without which pleasure can neither be imparted nor received. Just in proportion to the delicacy and force of this sympathy, is the pleasure derived from society; and they possess it in the most intense and vivid degree who can most imperceptibly slide into the feelings of others, so as to incorporate for a time their sentiments, feelings, and dispositions with their own. Hence we plainly perceive that there is a preparation in the very nature of society, that society especially which is chosen and of a voluntary nature, for an assimilation of our minds to the views and principles, sentiments and dispositions, of those with whom we converse.

We not only go into society unarmed, but we go with a preparation in favour of the action of the sentiments and the agency of the minds of others which is then operating upon us. We go with the intention of being pleased with the sympathies which that intercourse excites, and lay our hearts and minds, as we experience or expect social pleasure, open as much as possible to the full and entire action of the social instinct. Let us suppose then, at least, that the society into which we enter is not positively vicious, in any other sense than as it is distinguished by a total absence of religion; let the persons with whom we associate be only characterized by an entire neglect of God, an absence of the fear of the Almighty; let their general conduct and deportment be such, and such only, as might be supposed to take place if the verities of religion were exploded, and the expectation of a future account entirely dismissed: it is not too much to say that this society itself will possess a very pernicious influence over any mind. It is dangerous to be accustomed to the absence of religion, and to be familiarized to the contemplation of the most solemn and important subjects in a state of disunion from God, and non-advertence to the prospect of eternity.

For a person, especially a young person, to be accus-

tomed to hear life and death, judgement and eternity, and all the most serious and awful scenes or results of human existence spoken of, I will not say with unbecoming levity, but without advertence to religion, regarding only physical causes and effects, is a dangerous process, and must be attended with the most serious peril. Next to the infusion of positive piety, the most evil element in which the mind can be placed, is that out of which religion is expelled. To live "without God in the world," and to converse with those who thus live, is, only in a lower degree than positive impiety, less dangerous to a creature who is in a state of probation, and whose everlasting interest depends on acquaintance with and obedience to his Maker.

I recollect, some years ago, that upon reading some very popular tales (Moral Tales they are styled), the talent of which is exceedingly great, but which are distinguished by the total absence of religion, and the want of all reference to it even in the scenes of death; the influence on my mind was such that, during the time devoted to that reading, it was with great difficulty and perplexity I was able to discharge my ministerial duties. It became, therefore, painfully evident to me, that to be conversant long together with trains of thought or associations of ideas from which religion is entirely excluded is of most dangerous tendency; for religion is a positive thing, and at the same time, it requires to be brought into view: it must be realized by an effort of the mind; it addresses not itself to the senses, does not occur naturally in the paths of life; it lies in an invisible state, and can only be realized by a positive act of faith, and be made operative by a serious exertion of the mental faculties, by calling our attention to spiritual impressions and thereby overpowering the mechanical and necessary operations of sensible objects.

In the next place, suppose the society into which we enter be vicious in the sense before adverted to; that it be impure society, distinguished by the prevalence of indelicate jests and lascivious associations; such communications, it is unnecessary to say, *must* corrupt good

manners. Must not the primary effect be, at least, gradually to enure the mind to the contemplation of vicious objects, without horror and disgust? Are you not aware that familiarity tends to weaken all impressions? As the mind is passive in receiving them, there is nothing so disgusting at the first view but it may be rendered indifferent, or even an object of complacency. Vicious objects, though they revolt a pure and chaste mind, though every well disciplined spirit turns aside from them with strong disrelish, yet they have such an alliance with the corrupt propensities of our nature, which always remain with us (for even the best are but partially sanctified), that the effect of bringing such objects frequently before the mind must be to subdue the antipathy, to wear off the impression of disgust, and soften the features of deformity; to teach us to contemplate such objects with indifference, till at length we shall certainly come to regard them with a greater or less degree of complacency. The horror of vice gradually subsides, till, before men are aware, they find themselves affected with the most impure conversation very differently from what they were at first. The chastity of the mind is violated; they have lost that instinctive recoil of disgust which such objects naturally inspire, and are become capable of partaking of them with the guilty zest, with which their association with the corrupt tendencies of our nature is too apt to invest them. This is a process perpetually going on. There are persons perpetually receiving the contamination of impurity by this channel. If, then, you meet with persons of this description, who delight to communicate the taint of impurity, and seek to draw down the minds of others to that gross element of sensuality in which they themselves are grovelling, "avoid them, pass not by them, turn from them and pass away;" recollect that such conversation is most essentially evil, and will, before you are aware, corrupt your "good manners."

Suppose, in the next place, that the society into which we enter be of an impious nature, distinguished by a rejection of christianity, or of its great and leading

doctrines, and has in it, consequently, the contagion of impiety; such communication cannot fail, in the strongest degree, to "corrupt good manners." To hear objections against christianity continually repeated, without being answered, to hear the cause of Christ attacked in every possible form, without being in a situation, in a becoming manner, to undertake its defence, must have an injurious tendency. Conversation, if we intend to please and be pleased, should never be a scene of continual dispute; we must either relinquish such society or hold our peace. That person who feels himself called upon on every occasion to defend his religion, will grow weary of contention, and seek repose in another kind of society. Or, if he continues in it, he will ere long learn to be silent; silence will lead to acquiescence, and, finally, he will adjust his opinions to the standard of those with whom he associates. Every man makes the esteem of his companions a good and leading object. When a person, therefore, from that motive, learns to suppress his convictions, he will easily pass from thence to that guilty shame of Jesus Christ before men, which is one of the most baneful elements of corruption and degeneracy. It is dangerous to be in that society where all is against christianity and nothing in its favour; where it is perpetually assailed in a variety of forms, and nothing said in a serious argumentative manner to sustain its interests and vindicate its sanctity. If any man supposes that he has strength of mind to continue in such society, without having the foundations of his confidence in the truths of christianity weakened, that man is entirely unacquainted with his own heart. You may feel conscious of no change of opinion, you may relinquish no article of faith, but the practical assent of the mind is capable of all sorts of varieties possible; the degree of conviction, the strength of that hold which religious principle has upon you, may be weakened in a most essential manner, before you have altered the speculative articles of your belief. The speculative belief in the great truths of christianity is, in pious minds, continually changing itself into practical belief, producing that sense of the reality of eternal

things which justifies the definition given of faith, as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Infidel society has the effect of weakening that practical conviction, of estranging the mind from the evidences of divine truth and bringing it into a state of obscurity: it is an element of darkness, and no person can preserve, within its sphere, a permanent and abiding conviction of such truths as are only seen by the eye of faith, and are best realized in the calmness of the sanctuary, and the solitude of the closet. Besides, we shall always find that those who have rejected the yoke of christianity, are anxious to propagate their disbelief; they have not the tranquillity of innocence, the confidence of truth; and they feel themselves strongly fortified, secure, and fearless, in proportion as they have swelled their confederacy, extinguished the conviction, and put out that light of faith in others, which is a condemning light to them, and holds out to them a fearful misgiving in the prospect of eternity. Those who are determined to bid farewell to christianity, have not done it in consequence of a serious process of conviction, but in consequence of consulting their passions, not their reason, determining to gratify their appetites, without restraint or control, and indulging in the pleasures and honours of this world without check. Conscious of this in a greater or less degree they fear that the foundation they are resting upon may prove insecure; they wish, therefore, to be strengthened by the cooperation of others, and feel a guilty satisfaction in proportion as they multiply disciples among their associates, and are thus enabled to hear an echo in every voice, and see the reflection of infidelity in every breast. Is it not extraordinary that men who can only boast that they have discovered that man is nothing,—that this world is the whole of his existence,—that his destiny is withered, and shrunk to the shortest possible compass,—is it not extraordinary that they cannot, at least be silent; that they should be desirous to propagate a discovery so full of shame and reproach? The reason is, that they have fears on the side of religion, though they have not its hopes; they

dread the truth of it, having given up all prospect of benefit from it, having relinquished all part in its consolations; therefore they feel their fears allayed, preturbation subside, in proportion as they swell their numbers by an extensive confederation. They are "deceiving and deceived."

Let me earnestly impress it on every one who wishes to be saved; (and if you do not, why approach the sanctuary of God, why hear the words of this book, why lift up a prayer to the throne of heaven in the name of the Great Redeemer?) if you wish to be saved, go not into such society, or, if you enter it unawares, remain not in it. To choose such persons as confidants of your hours of affectionate and social intercourse, is to live in an element of contagion; it is to go into a pest-house; it is to take up your abode in the midst of the most virulent and destructive disease. "Evil communications" will "corrupt good manners." No experience of our own,—no extent of observation can serve to invalidate or impair the truth of this maxim, which is confirmed by the experience of all ages.

III. But I proceed, in the third place, briefly to explain the warning here given, and to enforce the caution which is strongly implied in the words "Be not deceived." There are many sources of self-deception; let me, therefore, warn every one not to be deceived.

1. In the first place, be not deceived by the adduction of false precedents. It may be suggested, that our Lord was pleased to mingle indiscriminately with all classes and descriptions of persons; but do not imagine that it would, on that account, be safe for *you* to imitate this part of his conduct. Recollect the infinite disparity of his situation and character, and yours. He came into a world of contagion, but it was to impart the medicine of life; he came to a great infirmary, but he was himself the physician of souls; he "came to save sinners," but was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."* When Satan himself came, he found nothing in him. Does it follow that we, who are placed at so

* Heb. vii. 26.

infinite a distance beneath him, should be safe in such contagion? "Be not deceived;" do not take a partial view of our Saviour's character; do not consider one portion of it only—his exposure to moral danger,—while you forget his sanctity, his watchfulness, his care over his own conduct, his self-government, and the constant use of those rules of prudence and piety which are recommended by other parts of his example. If you can find an infallible way to overcome temptation, and achieve the victory over the enemies of your salvation, you may then plead the precedent of our Lord's example against the genius of his religion and the import of his precepts. It was impossible that his spotless character should be contaminated. Can *we* plead that exemption and impossibility?

2. Be not deceived by your past experience. You may be ready to say, that you have been frequently exposed to vicious society,—you may be living in it now, and perceive none of those evils, discern none of that degeneracy and corruption to which we have adverted; and you appear to pass through it with impunity; "Be not deceived;" you are very ill judges, it may be, of the state of your own minds; you may imagine that you have received no injury because you have fallen into no great crime, have violated none of the more essential laws of social morality; but, if you look within, you may perceive a preparation for the commission of these, in the weakening of that conscience which preserves you in the fear of God, in the decay and eclipse of the spirit of faith, in the relaxed hold of the great prospects of eternity which you had before. What has been the effect of such society on your private devotions? Has it carried you to your closet? Has it prepared you to retire for communion with God? Has it endeared to you the Scriptures, or estranged you from them? Has it made the transition easy, to the duties of private and solitary piety? Did you find such society calculated to make it more difficult, or more easy, for you to enter into the true spirit of religion; and to practise those duties, without which all the devotions of the

sanctuary will be only "walking in a vain show," and seeking the applause of man, instead of the approbation of Him who "seeth in secret."

3. Do not be deceived by any complacent reference to the time of life at which you have arrived, or the progress in religion which you have already made. Though the influence of evil society upon the young is of the most corrupting tendency; though their minds, in the period when the character is formed, are most subject to its hurtful influence; yet, the danger of "evil communications" is by no means confined to them. No: at whatever period of life you have arrived, "evil communications" *will* "corrupt good manners." Habits are lost in the same way as they are acquired; the fruits of long custom in right action are speedily dissipated and destroyed by exposure to contrary custom in doing wrong; and the mind of no person has arrived at such a state of confirmation in holy habits as to make a relaxation of vigilance safe, or enable it to yield itself up securely to the casual influence of place and society. Religion is a perpetual warfare; religion is a perpetual exercise of self-command; it is a perpetual reference to the will of God; it is a perpetual use of the power of self-government, and attention to the invisible eye of Him that seeth in secret. If you commit yourself to evil society now, what shall hinder you in the most advanged age from forsaking the law of God, and disgracing the latter part of your life by conduct totally different from that which conferred dignity on your youth? Solomon, in his youth, feared God, but when old age came upon him, through the contagious example of his idolatrous wives, he forsook the God of his fathers, and exposed his kingdom to perdition and ruin. No, my brethren, there is no such thing as depending upon any force of habit, unless its influence produces right conduct at present; if it inspires us with a holy resolution, and gives a right view of our duty at the present moment, and determination to adhere to it, we may rejoice in that habit; but if it produces recumbency, a slothful dependence upon God, and neglect of the precautions of religion and the rules

of duty, we have reason to believe, that he who thus thinketh he standeth, will soon fall.

4. Be not deceived by any supposed strength of resolution with which you may enter into such society. It is much easier abstained from than denounced. The paths of sinners are much more easily shunned than they are quitted. When confederacies are formed it requires a powerful effort to break them. It is far less difficult to keep out of society than to resist its current. The action of fire is mechanical and necessary, you may approach it or not; so you may avoid evil company if you please. The ranks of impiety are not so thin as not to give you sufficient warning to escape them; but when you are in them, in the very focus of temptation, no resolution you can exert, will, for a moment, stop its progress; you must submit to its action; you are committed to your fate and must take the consequences; you must be deteriorated and degenerated with the causes of deterioration and degeneracy. Be not deceived, then, by supposing that any previous resolution has considerable influence on the conduct of men, when they are off their guard and open to the impression of social affections. This is the season, of all others, in which mental resolution has least power; the mind is not only open, but, before it is aware, becomes relaxed; the love of association soon comes to supplant all other thoughts; all the cooler reflections, the wiser resolves of the closet vanish; all the force of the most strenuous intentions melt like wax before the sun, in the warmth of social intercourse. In proportion as the social affections are vivid and warm, in that proportion is the necessary effect in dissipating and giving to the wind the force of the most strenuous resolutions.

Hence permit me to suggest one or two cautions of prudence. In the first place, let those who have a serious sense of religion bind themselves with the vows of God, and enter on a solemn profession of them, at an early period of life. Enter into the church of God, take upon you the vows of the Almighty; if your hearts are sincere towards him, if you have reason to believe

you are in earnest in seeking after him, and have committed yourself to the Redeemer, take upon you his yoke openly, bear his name upon your forehead before men. This will have the happiest effect in strengthening you against the force of evil example. Recollecting the nature of your engagements, you will be awakened to a sense of consistency of conduct, and be shocked at the thought of bringing reproach on the cause of God. A feeling of self-respect will come in aid of the higher principles of religion, and the higher motives to virtuous conduct. You will remember that you have assumed, if I may so say, a peculiar caste; and when you look upon the pure and holy robe of the profession of christianity you thus wear, you will be anxious, if you have been sincere in making that profession, to keep it "unspotted from the world." It is well, in such a state of temptation, to render difficult, if not impossible, indeed, to put yourself on ground from which you cannot retreat. Now, he who has done this effectually, has given up his name to Christ, and enrolled himself among his disciples, has gone forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach, and thus cut off his own retreat; he renders it impossible to consult his earthly interests at the expense of piety, without bringing upon himself all the reproaches of his conscience, the ridicule of unbelievers, and the contempt of his companions and of mankind.

Let all young persons, then, bind themselves with the vows of God, and unite themselves to those whom God has touched by his Spirit, and is guiding, under the convoy of the Captain of Salvation, to eternal glory. The church will willingly receive all such as are desirous of uniting themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant, and will say, as Moses did to Hobab: "Come with us, and we will do you good; we are going to the land of which the Lord our God hath said, I will give it you."* Are you linked in with society from which you find it difficult to break? Change your place of abode, make a sacrifice of worldly convenience, nay, relinquish

* Numb. x. 29.

some of the tendernesses of life, rather than fail in securing your safety: there is no place so dangerous, none from which you ought to flee with so much rapidity, as that which is the seat of contagion, where, enlinked with vicious associates, you cannot remain without being in the way to perpetuate your confederacy with sinners. Flee from such a place; as you would not "walk in the counsel of the ungodly;" stand not "in the way of sinners," lest you "sit down in the seat of the scorners." Flee, then, as for your life. These, you know, are different stages in depravity, different degrees of progress in corruption; walking "in the counsel of the ungodly" is the first; he who does that will next "stand in the way of sinners," and that is a ready and proper preparation for sitting down "in the seat of the scornful."* Do you wish not to be ashamed of Christ before men? Go into society which shall not tempt you to that shame; seek those associates before whom you may, without a blush, lift up your heads and avow your attachment to a once crucified, but now glorified, Redeemer.

Let it be remembered, that with those with whom you voluntarily associate here, you shall be associated hereafter by the disposer of all things, for ever: with those persons with whom you choose to spend your time, you must spend your eternity; these are inseparably allied. Those who choose the society of the vicious, those who keep company with the enemies of God in this world by choice and election, will have their portions with such in the regions of everlasting darkness. Eternity is pressing on: ask yourselves, then, with whom would you wish to be associated when "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God" shall proclaim that "there shall be time no longer." With whom would you choose to rise? With whom would you have your everlasting portion? With patriarchs and prophets? With evangelists and apostles? With saints and martyrs now shining forth in the glories of celestial radiance? or with those who, having slighted the warnings and despised the mercies of

* Psalm i. 1.

the Lord, must assuredly "awake to shame and everlasting contempt."* There are but two societies in the universe, the church and the world; the servants of God and the servants of Satan; the votaries of time and the votaries of eternity: they are each of them claiming your regard, and saying to ingenuous youth, "Come with us," and holding out their respective allurements and attractions. One presents "the pleasures of sin for a season," to be followed by bitter remorse and everlasting despair; the other the prize of immortality, the society of saints, calm of conscience, quiet of mind, the peace of a self-approving spirit, consolation unutterable, and that only as the earnest of the pleasures to be enjoyed at the right hand of God: that fulness of joy which is for evermore.

Recollect, also, that time is pressing on, and we shall soon be that which we shall continue to be for ever. Do not say, I will remain a little longer in the society of wicked persons, I will loiter a little longer in the pursuit of sin and sensual gratification, in the neglect of God and religion. While you are halting, God may decide for you; he has no sympathy with hesitation, but looks with contempt and abhorrence on the infatuation, and wretched folly and guilt of that mind which prefers the applause of the world, the pleasures of sin, and the gratification of a moment, to the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," which accrues from his favour and friendship. He has no sympathy with such persons, he abhors them; at least, they are exercising his patience every day. Despise not, then, "the riches of his goodness and long-suffering," lest, while you are halting between two opinions, God should lift up his hand "and swear that you shall not see his rest." "To-day," then, I say, to-day, "if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness."†

Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, "for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighte-

* Dan. xii. 3. † Psalm xcv. 7, 8.

ousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" * For you are the temple of the living God, if you are Christians; and to be such I trust every one here is aspiring, as He hath said, "I will dwell with them and walk in them, and I will bless them; I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Therefore, "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord; touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Most High God."†

XIX.

THE EVILS OF IDOLATRY, AND THE MEANS OF ITS ABOLITION.‡

[PREACHED AT BRISTOL, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE BAPTIST MISSIONS, NOVEMBER 2, 1826.]

ISAIAH ii. 18 —" *The idols He shall utterly abolish.*"

THE progress of Christianity in the world has already been so great and wonderful, as to carry evidence of its divine original, and of its promised final triumph over every false religion. Its vast effects have been produced principally by the simple instrument of preaching its doctrines, attended by the promised influence of the Holy Spirit. The same instrument, attended by the same influence, may be reasonably expected to effect the ultimate conversion of all the nations. This most desirable object we are on the present occasion assembled to promote.

It is agreed by expositors, that, in the connexion of the text, the success of the gospel is predicted:—as a

* 2 Cor. vi. 14—16. † 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

‡ Printed from the Notes of the Rev. Thomas Grinfield.

remarkable feature by which its success would be distinguished, the destruction of idolatry is mentioned in the words I have selected; in which two things are proposed to our attention; the evil to be abolished, and the means of its abolition.

I. The evil to be abolished. This, as you will observe, is idolatry. It has been commonly and very properly distinguished, as of two kinds, *literal* and *spiritual*. The latter, or *spiritual* idolatry, is an evil which, by the apostasy of our nature, attaches to all mankind, whether inhabiting christian or pagan regions, except those individuals whose hearts have experienced a renovation by the Spirit of God. It is to the former, or *literal* idolatry, that the prophet refers in the text: this the connexion shows, where mention is made of those *idols of silver and gold*, which the converted idolaters would cast away. The progress of Christianity was, from the first, marked by the cessation of idol worship; and this was effected by the same means which are still to be employed. Men were called to *turn from their dumb idols to serve the living God*. The abandonment of a false worship must prepare the way for a moral revolution: men must cease from the adoration of images, before they can in any sense be worshippers of the true Jehovah.

There are two principal points of view in which we may regard the evil nature and effects of idolatry; its aspect toward God, and its aspect toward man. In the former aspect, it appears as a crime; in the latter, as a calamity: thus contemplated, it appears as an evil destructive equally to the divine glory, and to human happines. Man naturally tends to this evil; and one generation after another gradually accumulated the follies of superstition, till it reached the monstrous extreme of gross idolatry.

1. The word of God everywhere reprobates idolatry as an *abominable thing* which the soul of God abhors. To provide against it, was a principal object in the political and municipal department of the Mosaic law. It is expressly prohibited by the first and the second com-

mandment of the moral law; the first being designed to confirm the worship of the true God; the second, to exclude every idolatrous form of worship. Idolatry makes a material symbol of the invisible God; but so jealous is the Divine Being of his own honour, that he has forbidden, not only the worship of any other or false God, but even the worship of *Himself* by the medium of a graven image. The golden calf was intended as a representative of the God of Israel; and the calves set up by Jeroboam were the same: yet the worship of the golden calf occasioned the slaughter, by the divine command, of three thousand persons; and the executioners of divine vengeance were extolled for having forgotten the feelings of nature toward their nearest kindred: every man was commanded to slay his brother or his son, and so to consecrate himself to the Lord.* Where the honour of God was so deeply concerned, men were to lose sight of common humanity. When the Israelites were tempted by the artifices of Balaam to commit idolatry at Baal Peor, twenty-four thousand were slain at once; the memory of Phinehas was immortalized on account of the holy zeal he displayed in the destruction of certain conspicuous offenders; and the Moabites were devoted to extermination, because, in this respect, they had proved a snare to Israel. According to the divine appointment, credit was to be denied to the testimony of an idolater, and his life was to be taken by his nearest relative. All this marks the disposition, with regard to idolatry, of that Being, who is *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* If he does not now punish it as he once did, it is not that he hates it now less than formerly: but he spares men, that they may be brought to the knowledge of his will and his salvation: *Now he commands all men every where to repent, because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by Jesus Christ:* and he desires that we, who have received the gospel, should carry the tidings of this command to all mankind.

* Exod. xxxii. 29.

Idolatry is, with respect to the government of God, what treason or rebellion is with respect to civil government. It is the setting up of an idol in the place of the Supreme Power: an affront offered to that Majesty, in which all order and authority is combined and concentered, and which is the fountain of all social blessings. Hence, in the eye of God, nothing can dilute the turpitude, or diminish the guilt of this offence. It makes no difference what may be the character of the rival: there is still an entire transfer of allegiance from *the blessed and only Potentate*, to a palpable usurper; and the guilt remains the same. Were the idol cast in a mould of the purest moral beauty, it would still, as an idol, be a monster deserving universal execration. Were we even to suppose the character of the idol immaculate as that of Jesus Christ and God himself, the case would not be materially altered; an invasion would still be committed on the immense empire of the Most High.

Idolatry is an evil which, where it exists, taints every apparent virtue; because it destroys the soul of duty, which is obedience to the divine will, conformity to the divine command. Though there exists an eternal rectitude, independent of written revelation; yet we short-sighted creatures must resign ourselves to be guided by the *revealed* will of God; conformity to this is our only sure standard. And the Scriptures everywhere assure us, that nothing is acceptable to God that is not done under the influence of a sincere regard to his will. This is perfectly reasonable. Suppose a person to do accidentally, unintentionally, just what you would wish to have done; yet, if, in so doing, he had no design to please you, will his conduct satisfy you in the same manner as if he had acted from a regard to your wish, as your devoted servant? Your will, your authority, never entered into his views and motives; and can he expect that you should reward him? Thus nothing is done rightly, to any good purpose, where God is not regarded: the *single eye* is wanting; and, *that* wanting, *the whole body is full of darkness.* Men may do much

good from merely self-interested or ambitious motives; and they may *have their reward*, the only reward they ever sought, in success and applause. Nebuchadnezzar was employed by God as a rod to scourge his guilty people; and, having served that purpose, was cast aside. Pagan philosophers and heroes have exercised the virtues of temperance and moderation, without the least advertence to the Divine will; and hence, as Augustine remarks, their virtues can only be regarded as *splendid sins.* "God was not in all their thoughts;" God was as much forgotten in their virtues as he was in their vices; they remained as dead in sin, because as dead to God, as ever. They sought to be admired and idolized, in a world they were so soon to quit, by creatures whose applause was of no value; and they were as destitute of spiritual vitality as the most profligate of their fellow-mortals! Just as, amidst the awful solemnities of the last day, we may imagine the impassioned admirer of nature or art beholding with regret so many fair objects and heart-ravishing scenes, in which he once delighted, all alike consigned to the final conflagration; even so the christian may be supposed, on that occasion, touched with a momentary pang, to see many who here excited his admiration, many who perhaps obtained his esteem, and awakened his tenderest sympathies, yet numbered at last with them that are *lost!*—although he must then be satisfied, in a degree inconceivable at present, of the justice of their condemnation; inasmuch as (whatever they might have been besides) they were dead to God; "they worshipped the creature more than the Creator;" they were, in the essence of character, idolaters.

With respect to the *origin* of idolatry, it is probable that men began by raising images to the memory of departed heroes, and afterwards transferred their homage to the images themselves; until they gradually descended to the worship of the meanest objects, even those which are the most obscene and unutterable. There is nothing so vile, filthy, disgusting, or horrible, that has not, by some nation, been selected as an object of worship. Happily we, my brethren, are situated so remote, both

in time and place, from the principal of these abominations, that we are able to form only a very inadequate idea of the enormous folly to which they have proceeded.

2. But we turn to contemplate idolatry on another side; in its aspect toward man, its influence on society.

The apostle Paul informs us, that God hath shown to men what may be known concerning himself; that his invisible being, his eternal power and godhead, may be clearly seen and understood by the works of creation; so that "those are *without excuse* who have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image in the likeness of corruptible man, of birds, and beasts, and reptiles."* They are *without excuse;* their conduct admits of no apology: *wherefore*, as the apostle adds, *God gave them up to a reprobate*, a base, and undiscerning *mind;* and, *as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, he gave them up to their own vile affections*, and left them to violate even the laws of nature.

The origin of all the atrocities they committed is to be found in aversion to God; dislike of the spirituality and purity of his character, a desire, like Cain, to retire from the presence of their Maker; a wish to forget a Being whose character they knew to be utterly uncongenial with their own. This disposition originally led men to substitute idols for God. Those idols would, of course, be conceived of a character unlike that of God. Men would never form their imaginary deities after the model of him whom they disliked: accordingly, they receded to the utmost possible distance from all resemblance to the holy, omniscient, glorious God of Abraham and of Israel. Impure themselves, they were not disposed to adopt a God of purity: full of malignant passions they could form no conception of a God of love—a Father pouring out his blessed fulness, and delighting in beneficence to his vast family. No, my brethren, their gods were of a different description; vindictive tyrants, divided, like themselves, by eternal factions and conten-

* Rom. i. 19--25.

tions; each pursuing his favourite objects and patronizing his adopted party.

Homer, the first who appears to have composed a regular picture of idolatry, paints his Jupiter, or supreme deity, as deficient in every divine attribute; in omnipotence, in justice, and even in domestic peace. He paints Juno as the victim of eternal jealousy; and with good reason for her jealousy, when the earth was peopled, according to Homer, with the illegitimate progeny of Jupiter, to whom almost every hero traced his pedigree. Mars was the personification of rage and violence; Mercury, the patron of artifice and theft. How far such a mythology influenced the character of its votaries, it is perhaps impossible for us to know: nothing could be more curious than to look into the mind of a heathen. But it is certain that the mind must have been exceedingly corrupted by the influence of such a creed: and probably each individual idolater would be influenced by the deity whose character happened to be most accommodated to his own peculiar passions. Achilles would emulate Mars in ferocity and deeds of blood: Ulysses would be like Mercury in craft and stratagem: while the ambitious mind of Alexander or Julius Cæsar would aspire to act a Jupiter on earth. What a state of society must that be, in which no vice, no crime could be perpetrated that was not sanctioned by the very objects of religious worship! What a religion *that* which exerted an antagonist force against conscience itself!—a religion which silenced or perverted the dictates of the moral sense, *the thoughts that should either accuse or excuse us* within! The temples of Venus, we are informed, were crowded by a thousand prostitutes, as servants and representatives of that licentious goddess; the very places of their worship were the scenes of their vices, and seemed as if they were designed to consecrate the worst part of their conduct!

In modern India, idolatry is exemplified on a scale scarcely less extensive; and everywhere it is marked by two leading qualities, *cruelty* and *impurity*. The Hin-

doo deities are of a ferocious and sanguinary character, and are supposed to drink out of the skulls of their victims. The more we become acquainted with these idolaters, like Ezekiel, when he surveyed the *chambers of imagery*, we discover only the *greater abominations.* In their system, as connected with their conduct, there is a perpetual action and re-action; vice generating idols, and idols fortifying vice. First, we find mere abstractions of the mind formed concerning the Deity; these are next embodied in idols; and all the human passions are enlisted by devotion itself on the side of vice. *Here*, in a country influenced by the light of revelation, we are accustomed in all our ideas to associate religion and morality: we never suppose a truly religious man can be any other than a good moralist; when we see a person who fears God, and refers even his thoughts to conscience, we never doubt that his practice is correct; his word is as an oath to us; because the standard he adopts is the Divine will, and he is himself a faint image and adumbration of the moral glory of God. But the fire of piety, instead of kindling, would only quench the fire of idolatry. A man must be unfitted for that worship, in exact proportion to his fear and love of God. The image of Satan must displace the image of God, in the heart of every idolater.

II. Hitherto we have attended to a melancholy subject, and have seen only the nakedness and degradation of our race. We must now more briefly advert to a brighter scene, presented by the prophet, when he assures us that Jesus Christ (of whom he is speaking) will utterly abolish idolatry, and sweep it from the face of the earth with the "besom of destruction;" not a worshipper of idols shall be left at last, but His wrath shall consume that man. In sending the gospel to the heathen, you offer, as it were, the holy incense, like Moses, when he interposed between God and the perishing Israelites: you stand, like him, *between the dead and the living*,—the dead and the living for eternity!—and you *stay the plague!*

No sooner did christianity appear, than its formidable

power, as the opponent of idolatry, was felt and manifested. Pliny,* writing about seventy years after the death of Christ, declared to the Emperor Trajan, that, in the province of Bithynia, where he presided as pro-consul, the temples were nearly deserted: a striking proof how rapidly the system of paganism gave way before the sword of the Spirit wielded by the primitive missionaries. One unhappy exception, indeed, still remains, in the idolatrous worship of the Romish church; but the triumphs of the gospel are advancing, and as we have lately seen the islands of the South Sea casting away their ancient idols *to the moles and to the bats*, so shall every system of idolatry and false worship be utterly, and for ever, overthrown.

Preaching, an instrument so unpromising in the view of carnal reason, has been the chief instrument employed in producing these moral revolutions. *When, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God;* when the only Being against whom all conspired, was the Maker of all, and men proved themselves to be blind at noonday; *it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* Nothing but this can save them: woe be to that man who teaches that there is any proclamation of salvation that includes not the preaching Jesus Christ. This is the instrument which God has crowned with success. Before the rising Sun of Righteousness, idolatry melted away, as wax before the fire; and effects, the reverse of those produced by that baneful system will always attend the beneficent progress of the gospel. Cruelty and impurity disappear in holiness and brotherly love. Christianity, instead of severing the ties of nature, harmonizes and unites the most distant from each other, as brethren; according to the design of our Saviour, *that he should gather together in one the children of God, that were scattered abroad;* while those, who before were stained with every vice, are purified in their hearts and conduct by the influence of heavenly truth.

* See the note at page 331 of this volume.

In proportion, my brethren, as you value the blessings of religion, you will wish that others should partake them with yourselves: in proportion as you are disposed to pray, *Lord, evermore give us this bread;* you will desire to communicate it to all beside. You will love your brethren, as you love your Saviour, *not having seen* either: if you have been divinely taught, this will be your feeling in regard to all mankind. That man's heart is not right with God, who can look, unmoved, upon the vast heathen world, lying *dead in trespasses and sins;* dead by a moral, a voluntary death, such as cannot be pleaded in arrest of the divine judgement. But, though they have destroyed themselves, in God is their help; he "has laid help on one that is mighty," "to save even to the uttermost" The Father has appointed his beloved Son to be the dispenser of all spiritual blessings, as Pharaoh appointed Joseph to be the dispenser of bread to the perishing Egyptians; and as Pharaoh answered every application by saying, Go to Joseph; the Father says to sinners, Go to Jesus Christ with all your wants; no man can come to the Father but by him. He is the ark in which all the hopes, all the treasures, of human nature are deposited, in him is all the fulness of God.

A cause so great and sacred as that of christianity absorbs all those differences and divisions, of a minor kind, that exist among us: and I trust and believe there is not a missionary of our own Baptist communion, who would not infinitely prefer the conversion and salvation of one soul, to making the whole heathen world adopt our views of a disputed and comparatively inconsiderable ceremony. If there is such a man, I am no party to his sentiment; there exists no communion between us; let not my soul enter into that man's secret! No, my dear brethren! we, I trust, have far higher views; the only kind of proselytes we desire to make are proselytes to God and Jesus Christ! In the promotion of such a cause, we are ready to forget our own denomination, and to co-operate with every other; we feel that with such an object proposed, were *we* to sit still, the very stones in our streets would cry out, and almost rise

up into bibles and missionaries! Contribute, brethren, to the support and extension of this sacred enterprise, and you will convert uncertain riches into the means of bestowing *the true riches*,—of diffusing *the unsearchable riches of Christ;* your contributions will become, in the hand of God, bibles, instructions, prayers, sermons; the messengers of saving mercy to many immortal souls.

XX.

CHRIST'S MISSION FOR THE ADOPTION OF SONS IN THE FULNESS OF TIME.*

[PREACHED AT MELBOURNE, NEAR ROYSTON, SEPTEMBER 1827.]

GAL. iv. 4, 5.—"*But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*"

THE Galatians, among whom Paul had taught the religion of Christ, were soon led astray as to some of its most essential and important doctrines, by the arts of Judaizing teachers.

They admitted and inculcated the obligation of circumcision and other ceremonies of the ancient law, maintaining that without these men could not be saved; thereby vacating and superseding the sacrifice of Christ, and denying the sufficiency of his mediation and death for the salvation of sinful men. Of these Paul testified that, if any man submitted to circumcision on this ground, with a view to procure acceptance with God, or as any ingredient of justification in his sight, for such a person Christ had died in vain. He subverts the only foundation laid in Zion, by mixing those observations of the law of Moses, which were typical of Christ and his kingdom, with his satisfaction, as the ground of acceptance with the just and holy God.

* Printed from the Notes of the Hon. Baron Gurney.

In order to recall the Galatians from these errors, he directs their attention in the words just read, to the great and fundamental doctrine of Christ's incarnation and atonement, to its completeness and efficacy, not only in saving us from guilt and condemnation, but in reinstating us in the divine favour, and bestowing on us inexpressible privileges; admission into his family and the reception of that spirit of adoption which is the spirit of his Son, whereby Christians feel the dispositions and perform the duties of obedient children to their heavenly Father. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons; and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father."

In these words there are three things that demand our attention;

I. The mission of Jesus Christ, and the manner in which he manifested himself.

II. The design of his mission; "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

III. The fitness of that season which God, in his infinite wisdom, appointed for this purpose; it was in "the fulness of time."

1. In the first place, these words present to our attention the great fact of Christ's mission from the Father, and his appearance in our world. Of the dignity of the person of our Saviour, as denoted by the expression, "God sent forth his Son," we have sufficient notice in various parts of the New Testament.

The character of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, is placed in contrast with the dignity of angelic intelligences, and is asserted in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the bright-

ness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than they, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." To denote the inexpressible dignity of Jesus Christ, as being one with the Father in his most essential prerogatives and perfections, he is here styled "his Son." The Father gave him birth; he came into the world having existed before it; "he came unto his own, and his own received him not;" even He, that Word which "was with God and was God," and without whom "was not any thing made that was made," He, the Eternal Word and Son of God, "became flesh; that is, assumed our nature, "and dwelt among us." His goings forth were from everlasting, and his manifestations among the ancient tribes of Israel not unfrequent. We have reason to believe that those symbolical appearances of God, by which the patriarchs and Moses and the prophets communed with the Most High, were anticipated representations and appearances of Christ. But they were occasional and transient, and in them he wore "the form of God;" but when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son to take up his abode with human nature, to tabernacle among us.

The manner in which this manifestation was made, and the leading circumstances attending it, are marked out in this passage, "he was made of a woman," and "made under the law." Every one must be aware of the peculiarity of the phrase, *made of a woman*, and will

no doubt infer from it something peculiar in the circumstances of our Saviour's birth. Accordingly, we find the sacred writers distinctly inform us of the miraculous production of our Lord by the power of the Holy Ghost. Thus the angel saluted the blessed virgin, "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." In every possible sense Jesus Christ possesses this character. In his pre-existent state he was the Word and the Son of God; in his human nature he bore that relation as being the immediate production of the Almighty; as it is also said of Adam in the genealogy given by St. Luke that *he* was the Son of God.

This particular of our Saviour's existence, as being miraculously conceived by the Holy Ghost, is frequently noticed in the Old and New Testament, and no doubt possesses great importance in the plan of redemption. Thus, when the first transgression entered into the world by the subtlety of Satan, God pronounced this curse upon that apostate spirit who presented himself under the semblance and form of a serpent, "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." No satisfactory account can be given of Jesus Christ, who is here plainly prophesied of as the seed of the woman, but in the circumstance alluded to in the passage before us; that is his miraculous conception, in relation to which he was emphatically and peculiarly made of a woman, standing in a more immediate connexion with that sex than the other. When God was pleased to afford a remarkable and illustrious promise of the appearance of his Son, it was combined with the mention of this particular, "the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," which is interpreted by the evangelist Matthew, "God

with us." Again, St. Luke says, "Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph;" plainly intimating that he was not so, but was in reality the immediate production of a divine power.

In the second chapter of the first epistle to Timothy, notice is taken of the circumstances attending the entrance of sin in the first transgression. When inculcating the duty of silence and submission on the part of the women, and particularly in the church of Christ, he says, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding, she shall be saved *in* childbearing" (as we have it; but it is improperly rendered, and should be, *by* child-bearing) "if they continue in faith and charity, and holiness with sobriety." There is no reason to doubt that the true meaning is *by the child-bearing*, referring not to the pains of parturition, but to the extraordinary event of the birth of our Saviour in a miraculous manner. She shall be saved, notwithstanding she was the means of human ruin by admitting the solicitations of Satan, if she continue in the exercise of christian virtue, and is herself a faithful servant of the Lord God; she shall be saved by the child-bearing, by that signal and miraculous child-bearing which took place in the birth of the Messiah. The apostle is not adverting to any temporal circumstance; he is speaking of the entrance of sin by means of the woman, and it is natural to throw in a compensatory circumstance, reminding us, that as the inferior sex had been the source of human perversion, so it had the honour of being the immediate instrument of the production of the Messiah, by whom our recovery was effected. And the condition which follows, "if they continue in faith and charity, and holiness with sobriety," puts this interpretation beyond doubt; as there is the greatest connexion between faith and virtue, without which our faith is vain, but none whatever between perseverance in holiness and exemption from the pains of child-birth.

The circumstances of our Saviour's incarnation placed

him at an immeasurable distance from all the other parts of the human race. He was the immediate production of God; by his divine power he was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and thereby completely exempted from the taint of original sin, which attaches to all the posterity of Adam. He was the holy thing born of a virgin. He was by constitution placed in the same state as our first parents; he underwent a similar but severer trial, and continued to maintain his innocence against all the assaults of Satan, overcoming his stratagems by his wisdom and sanctity, and his violence by his powers of endurance.

In the next place it is said, he was "made under the law." The term *made* here plainly implies that he was put into a situation different from that which was originally natural to him. Such an expression could not with propriety be used respecting any one who was, by the constitution of his nature and at every period, subject to the law. It is best illustrated, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," by the striking passage in the epistle to the Philippians, where St. Paul is inculcating the duty of condescension and lowliness among christians: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation" (or emptied himself, divested himself of that glory which he had before all worlds), "and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Here we see Christ is set forth as the greatest example of condescension, in that, though he bore the form of God, yet he took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. These particulars could not have evinced any humility in our Saviour, on the supposition of his having no previous existence, nor a nature higher than human. No person was ever praised for humility in that respect, that he was found in fashion as a man, or appeared as the servant of the Most High: these are the necessary

appendages of his condition and existence, quite foreign from his will, and cannot for a moment enter into the consideration of that part of his moral character which respects lowliness of mind. But if we believe, as the Scriptures tell us, that Jesus Christ *was* "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," that he "*was* with God and was God," nothing can set forth his condescension in a more striking point of view than his taking upon him the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Then, indeed, there was room for choice and election respecting his appearance in our world, and that event must have been the effect of his own purpose and the object of his entire complacency. "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil."

The necessary condition of every *creature*, however exalted, is that of submission to the law of God. The obligation of obeying his precepts and of sustaining his penalties in case of the violation of them is inherent, we have the strongest reason to believe, in every finite nature. We cannot dismiss from our minds the connexion between being produced by the Divine Being and being subjected to his law. But here we have presented to us a new and extraordinary spectacle,—that of a person in our nature, who has taken upon him that nature by appearing in the form of man, and thereby *become* subject to the law of God. *He* was "*made* under the law;" whereas all other creatures *are* under it by the very terms of their existence, by the very condition of their nature. He was *made under the law* as really as he was *made of a woman.*

Our Lord was made under the law in every sense. Divines have generally considered that Jesus Christ was made under three laws, or under the law considered in three points of view. First, he was made under the *ceremonial* law, and subject to all its rights and ceremonies. He frequented the synagogue and the temple; he was circumcised the eighth day, and dedicated to the

Lord in the usual manner; he was observant in paying the dues of the temple. That homage, from which he was exempt as the Son of God, he submitted to observe, lest the Jews should take offence. In no part of his conduct do we find any accusation from his bitterest enemies of violating the law, except in the single particular of his working miracles on the Sabbath-day, which he justified by showing that "man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man," and that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath-day." In every other respect he was observant of the law to the very letter, and well might he say to his most inveterate foes, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?"

He was made, also, under the *moral* law, and was observant of all its unchangeable duties. In all his conduct to his Heavenly Father, to his fellow-creatures, and to himself, he was an example of perfect piety, benevolence, and purity. There was, in the whole of his deportment that which spoke him to be the "Lamb of God," holy, without blemish and without spot. "Such an High-priest became us," was suited to our circumstances, and alone equal to our exigence and danger, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." In him alone was exhibited a perfect pattern of obedience to the law of God, and thereby he was prepared, in part at least, to be an oblation for the sins of men. Unless he had been a *spotless*, he could not have been an *acceptable* sacrifice; but as his human nature rendered him an appropriate victim, so also his immaculate purity made him fit in respect of moral quality to be offered up as an expiation to divine justice.

But, besides this, he was made under the *mediatorial* law, a law more rigid and awful than any other. For, standing in the stead of sinners, representing their persons, and being exposed to the penalties of a broken law, he endured the wrath of God which was kindled against us, submitted to that death which was denounced against our transgressions, and by "death destroyed death." He came into the world under the necessity of suffering; he came into it principally for the purpose of

dying; death was the end of his life, the very design of his being. He came not to reign, but to obey; not to rejoice, but to sorrow; not to live a life of ease and comfort, of dignity and splendour, but of poverty, self-denial, and reproach; and then to expire in agony upon the cross. This was the very object of his appearance in our world, and of this he never lost sight for a moment, amidst the highest efforts of miraculous exertion and the loudest applauses of an admiring multitude. "I have a baptism," he says, "to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"

II. Let us observe, in the second place, with what view Jesus Christ was thus "made of a woman," and "made under the law." It was to "redeem them that were under the law, that we may receive the adoption of sons." If we believe that Jesus Christ was that glorious personage who was with the Father before all worlds, that he was his true and proper Son, essentially partaking with him in the perfections of Deity, we shall not admit that he came into the world to accomplish a purpose which could be effected by other means or by an inferior agent. We shall be inclined to assign to him some signal achievement to which the properties of his nature, and the elevation of his rank, were alone equal. Whatever end could have been accomplished by an inferior person we shall not suppose to be the only design of the incarnation of Christ. For He who doeth nothing in vain, and wasteth no power in carrying his purposes into effect, He who is frugal in the economy of creation, who is frugal in the economy of his providence, would not lavish a superfluity of greatness and glory upon the work of our salvation. If the ends to be attained could have been attained by any inferior instrumentality, those instruments would have been employed. If the Saviour came into the world for no other purpose than that of teaching a true doctrine, it is plain that this could have been done by the agency of men alone. It was done by Moses, who rivetted the attachment of the people, from generation to generation, to a burdensome and painful ritual; the prophets sufficiently attested their mission

from Heaven, and were regarded, by all the pious and thinking part of the Jewish nation, with the profoundest deference. If our Saviour, therefore, came into the world to reveal a fact, such as a future life, and exemplify it in his own person, nothing more was necessary than that he should be a human being. Those, however, who believe that Jesus Christ possessed a higher nature, that he was the Son of God, a divine person, will admit, of course, that the end of his manifestation could not have been effected at less cost.

This leads us to consider him as the Redeemer. He came not merely to exemplify a rule of life, but to satisfy its violation; he came, not to explain the statutes of heaven, but to pay the penalty arising from the curse denounced against their transgression. He came essentially to change the moral situation of mankind, to roll away that mass of human guilt which lay, like the stone on our Saviour's grave, entombing all their hopes, and rendering it impossible for them to recover themselves from the condemnation and ruin in which they were involved.

Those who dispute the divinity of Christ act consistently in explaining away his sacrifice and atonement; the two doctrines are inseparably connected, and must stand or fall together. But they who are not so taught, but believe, in deference to apostolic testimony, that Jesus Christ "was with God," and "was God," will admit, with the greatest readiness and gratitude, that he came for the purpose of redemption. And how is this effected? Jesus Christ was made under the law, who was not originally under it, for the purpose of producing that righteousness, and creating that fund of merit in the eyes of an infinitely wise and holy Being, which should be imputed for the benefit of penitent believers, by dying on the cross a death which he never merited; and thus working out a justification, from which the spiritual wants of all mankind should be supplied, if they received his testimony and believed on his name. The character in which he appeared was that of a substitute; it was also that of days-man, a person who mediates between

two contending parties for the purpose of reconciliation. He alone being God as well as man, and thus laying his hands on both, was capable of accomplishing this great object; of satisfying the divine justice, and opening for guilty creatures an approach to the throne of heaven. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." He was oppressed, and he was afflicted;" or, as it is translated by Lowth (and very accurately, in my humble opinion), "it was exacted of him, and he was made answerable." The vicarious nature of Christ's sacrifice, the vicarious character of his appearance on earth, runs through all the statements in the New Testament. It is on this account that our warmest gratitude is challenged, and our strictest obedience required. "The love of Christ," says the apostle, "constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again." "The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many." "He that knew no sin was made sin for us." "He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification."

It is undoubtedly for the wisdom of the Divine Majesty to determine whether the law shall take its original course, or receive such a diversion as shall insure all the objects for which it was designed. It belongs, indeed, to the Divine Being to be just; but, if all the ends of justice be obtained by the substitution of another in the place of the offender, shall we impose limits on the decisions of the Almighty, and say that the right of dispensing with a law, as to the exact direction it may take, is not within the prerogative of Him by whom it was made and promulgated?

It belongs to him whose law is offended to determine in what way he will treat the offender; and it is perfectly competent for him to satisfy his own justice by some other method, and to substitute for the death of

the criminal the sacrifice and mediation of another, provided all the purposes which could have resulted from the condign punishment of sinners be equally effected.

But believing, as we do, that Jesus Christ is a divine person, the law of God is magnified by his death; the glory of the divine character as a holy being, his hatred of sin, his attachment to the law as a law of purity, appear to be greatly enhanced, and recommended to our notice with the highest advantage, in consequence of this sublime and astonishing event. If our Saviour was indeed the Son of God, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," then, to see him exhibited on the cross, dying under the divine wrath, and crying in the bitterness of his soul, "my God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" is to behold a more costly offering to divine justice, a more glorious assertion of the majesty of the law of God, than could have been displayed in the punishment of millions of creatures, or of worlds. Here we see the glory of the divine character shining forth in a manner the most consistent, harmonious, and consolatory, in the propitiation of Christ. Him hath God "set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God," "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

He came "to redeem them that were under the law;" and under this comprehensive title is included all mankind; Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, learned and unlearned: wherever human nature is diffused, transgression is diffused with it; wherever a child of Adam is found, there is found one who is under the law; it is a part of his nature, it is a condition of his being, to be born under the law. But as many as are under the law "are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." It is for deliverance from this curse, which extinguishes every ray ot hope, and shuts us up to eternal darkness, that we are indebted entirely to the mediation of our blessed Re-

deemer. He has delivered us "from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

We have yet to distinguish what is the effect of the divine appointment, and what is the natural result, in the great transactions connected with the sufferings of Christ. It is the effect of divine appointment that Jesus Christ became incarnate, that he was made capable of dying, by assuming a frail and finite nature. This is to be resolved solely into the sovereign pleasure of God; no reason can be assigned for it but his infinite mercy, no other explanation given than that "God is love." But when we look at this event in another stage of it, when we consider Jesus Christ as placed under these circumstances, as actually "made of a woman," and "made under the law," by that mysterious union of the divine and human natures; when we contemplate him as performing what he did perform, and suffering what he did suffer, as *our* substitute and on *our* account,—the necessary consequence is such a vindication of the divine character, such a display of the holiness and justice of God, that no lower effect could result from it than the justification and acceptance of all penitent believers. Christ could not but merit eternal life, and purchase for us the blessings of a glorious immortality, if we are interested by faith in the benefits of his redemption. The economy of our redemption proceeds entirely from God, but the connexion of its parts is not entirely *arbitrary.* They cohere together *necessarily;* and the sacrifice of Christ is effectual for the salvation of his people, not merely because God chose to annex such a value to it as might have been transferred to the blood of bulls and goats, but because the blood poured forth upon the cross was the blood of his own Son. It is the dignity of the victim which has completely satisfied the justice of the Almighty; and the redundancy of his merits that has procured for us higher blessings than we can either imagine or comprehend.

The apostle speaks with the greatest confidence, in contrasting the vain sacrifices of the law with the inherent sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ. "If the

blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God!" "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." He has effected for us, *necessarily*, an entire exemption from all liability to punishment, and procured us a title to the blessedness of heaven, because he was the Son of God; and we are interested in him.

It is said, moreover, that he redeemed them that were under the law, that they "might receive the adoption of sons." The immediate effect of Christ's death is the imputation of his righteousness to the believer, and this righteousness produces an instant acquittal from punishment; but such was the exuberance of his merits, such the dignity of his person, and the high complacency of the Father in his work, that it was worthy of him to bestow on them who were members of his Son, greater blessings than those which their first parents had forfeited. It was not merely to relieve from misery that Christ died; it was not only justification that was the fruit of his sufferings; but adoption into the family of heaven, the privileges of sons and daughters for all his believing people. In consequence of being united to Christ by faith and the Spirit, we partake of his peculiar prerogatives; and because he was the Son of God, God has "sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Thus we are "no longer servants, but children, being made nigh by the blood of Christ," and raised, we have reason to believe, to a greater height of happiness and glory than we could have aspired to reach, had we continued in a state of immaculate purity. Christ has *added* to our original brightness; he has not only redeemed us from the first transgression, but *accumulated* blessings which man, even in innocence, could never have obtained.

"Where sin abounded grace did much more abound, that as sin had reigned unto death, even so might grace

reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." Now every humble believer, every penitent approaching to the sacrifice of the Son of God, when he feels his conscience relieved from a sense of guilt, finds at the same time, through the anointing of the Spirit of God, a peace and joy, a confidence and trust springing up in his mind, which bespeaks a new relation; he approaches the Divine Being in a domestic character; he says, *My* father! God discloses to him his tenderest compassion, taking him, as it were, to his arms, rejoicing over him, and making him a son and heir of the Most High God. Therefore, henceforth he walks with God as a dear child, an imitator of his perfections, a sharer of the fulness of the glory of his heavenly Father. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God." Such appellations as these it would have been impious to assume, if God himself had not revealed them to us in his word, such privileges never entered into the contemplation of men in the most exalted state of perfection. God hath "sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father!"

Recollect, that if we are under the law, it is in consequence of not having approached to Christ by faith, and not having received the testimony of God respecting him. Recollect, also, that if we are under the law, we are under the curse; no middle state can be devised; there is no state betwixt a state of condemnation, and a state of justification; the legal state, which is one of bondage and fear, and the filial state, which is one of confidence and joy; no medium between that state of distance from God in which he appears as an enemy, and the condition of being adopted into his family, and an heir of his kingdom. There is an infinite variety in the human character, there is nothing more mutable than the apparent state of man; but there is an impassable barrier, a fixed line of demarcation, which separates the children of

God from the children of the devil. Those who do not receive Christ by faith, remain under the law, and are exposed to all its penalties; they live under its curse; at home, abroad, in solitude, in company, in suffering, in joy, in life and death, in every scene of existence, in every variety of condition, the wrath of God, like a dense cloud, hangs over them, replete with all the elements of misery and despair; and it must break upon them sooner or later. It approaches nearer and nearer; and is only prevented, by the slender thread on which their life depends, from discharging its fury on their devoted heads. Nothing can save but the death of Christ, no other name is given under heaven; this is the object to which the eye of faith, must be ever directed,—"the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." Have you looked to Him? Look into yourselves, and you find nothing but matter for despondency; look into your own hearts, and into your own conduct, and your performances will but remind you of the inadequacy and imperfection of your obedience. Know yourselves, and you know only what must minister to despair; but "*this is life eternal* to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." If you come to Christ and commune with him, you will find that poverty is exchanged for riches; condemnation for justification; dismay, and fear, and distrust of God, for a firm reliance on his promises, a strong hold on his mercy, and a filial relation to him as your heavenly Father.

We might suppose that, if men believed these truths in any degree, they would all be either rejoicing in Christ's redemption, or earnestly pressing forward, to obtain it; that every assembly would be divided into two classes,—those who, having embraced the salvation which is by Christ, find in him the joy and comfort of their lives, and those who, not having found this inestimable treasure, are earnestly desiring to possess it, and sedulously devoted to the search.

But that there should be persons neutral and unconcerned, believing at the same time, that the wrath of God is kindled against them, that they are hastening to

the divine tribunal, and that those who die in their sins will sink into destruction, is, indeed, infatuation that wants a name; angels look upon it with unutterable surprise, and their joy is proportionably great when they see one sinner repenting. But if there is joy in the presence of the bright inhabitants of heaven over a converted soul, what should be the joy of those to whom the intelligence of a Saviour is brought, who are invited to partake of the salvation which is prepared for them, and pressed to enter into alliance with God? Hear, then, the proclamation which is made to every one of you; "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else!" "Fury is not in me; who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them; I would burn them together:—or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace; and he shall make peace with me." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?"

These are truths which you have heard from time to time, but they are not on that account less essential to your welfare; for that very reason it is necessary that they should be reiterated, and that the "pure minds" of the most eminent Christians should "be stirred up" by them to fresh diligence and zeal. They are the bread of life, the food of the family of God; all real christians taste of them, and are sustained and fitted by them for all the functions and duties of the christian warfare.

Until you partake of this bread you have no life in you; the spirit is dead, the soul is withered and blasted, torpid and inactive, and lost to God; there is no vital union betwixt you and the Father of Spirits, you are severed from the spring of all felicity, by being in a state of alienation from God. Then will you begin to live indeed, to know the *divine* life, when you come and taste of the salvation of God, when you cast yourselves on the mercy of the Saviour, and say, "Lord, save or we perish." Then the mercy of God will be revealed unto you, and

you will one day join in singing "a new song, the song of Moses and the Lamb," which none can sing but they who are redeemed from the earth.

III. In the third place, permit me to observe, that we have presented to us, in this passage, the fitness of the season at which Jesus Christ was manifested; it is described as "the fulness of time." It was the fulness of time, because it was the period foretold by the prophets; Jesus Christ appeared exactly at the time predicted by those who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

It was foretold by Jacob, in his dying moments, that it was to take place before political power departed from Judah,—"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Our Saviour appeared at that critical period; the sceptre had recently departed from Judah, the semblance of political power had vanished from the Jewish nation, Herod had reigned for some time, and it was evident, therefore, that He that was to come was at hand.

It was foretold that it was to be during the existence of the second temple. The prophet Haggai thus comforts those who had witnessed the splendours of the first, and mourned over the meanness of the second as compared with that of Solomon: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." As if he had said, I can easily accumulate riches far exceeding those which Solomon collected, and which may be lavished by the monarchs of the earth in all the exuberance of their wealth, "the silver and the gold are mine;" but I will bestow on this house a nobler gift, here will I display a costlier treasure, "in this place

will I give peace." There Jesus Christ, the great peace maker, preached the gospel of peace; in that temple he wrought many of his miracles; and in its immediate vicinity, on Mount Calvary, offered himself up for the sins of the world.

It was foretold, moreover, that it should be within "seventy weeks" from the period marked out by Daniel; and though some difficulty exists as to the mode of computation, yet, on every principle it is plain, that they have long since elapsed; and the Jews are, therefore, under the greatest delusion in looking for the Messiah at a future period. Indeed, such is the antipathy of the Jews to this prophecy, that it is a popular proverb among them, "Cursed is he that counteth the weeks."

In short, all the characters of time, though they are not very numerous, as they are not equally important with some others, and were probably revealed only for the purpose of uniting the expectations of the Jews to a particular and defined period; all these characters perfectly conspire with the æra of Christ's appearance. It was on this account, probably, that such a general expectation existed, when Christ came, of the near approach of some exalted personage. In former times, no one was asked whether he was the Christ; but no sooner had John begun to preach a holy doctrine than the question was put to him, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" This expectation is noticed by heathen writers as prevailing over great part of the East, but especially in Judæa and the surrounding country. It was during a period of the profoundest peace; the temple of Janus was shut, and all nations were kept as in a state of watchful silence, waiting for the appearance of this Divine Person, and with ears open to catch the accents of his "still small voice."

It was also a period of considerable advancement in politics, in legislation, in science and arts, and manners: mankind were in a great degree civilized; learning had long flourished, and the most brilliant geniuses had appeared that had ever adorned the annals of human kind. It was therefore a most favourable time to prevent im-

posture in matter of fact. It was also an age the farthest removed from that credulity which distinguishes ignorant nations; an age of scepticism, when disbelief of all religion prevailed to a great extent amongst the learned. The Epicurean doctrine, which maintained the indifference of human actions and the cessation of existence at death, had swallowed up all other sects. The disciples of this philosophy denied a Deity, or asserted such an ideal one as remains in a state of torpor and inactivity, heedless of the concerns of this lower world. No period could be conceived so little adapted to the exhibition of a *false*, and so well calculated to put to the test the merits of a *true*, religion. They had wits sharpened by curiosity, so that they would eagerly inquire after whatever was new; but, at the same time, they were disposed to treat with contempt that which pretended to be supernatural. They had long been accustomed to laugh at their own gods; and though they might imagine that there was some safety attached to the ancient superstitions, yet in their private life and expectation, it is evident that they did not in the least connect any serious anticipation of happiness with the worship, or punishment with the neglect, of their deities. The Infinite Wisdom saw fit to select this time to silence for ever the vain babblings of philosophy, to "destroy the wisdom of the wise," and "bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

It was a most favourable time, inasmuch as it was a period of toleration. Had it been at a later period, when men began to attach that degree of importance to religion which was its due, the infant sect might have been crushed at once. But the Divine Being was pleased to suspend the fury of emperors, and to preserve his people by inspiring some measure of the spirit of toleration in the breasts of those who held the sceptres of this world. Nero's persecution was confined, we have reason to believe, principally to Rome and its environs; and ages passed away before any great attempt was made by the rulers of Rome to put down this new religion.

It cannot be said that Christianity stole on the world

like a thief in the night; it cannot be said that it owed its success to the credulity of mankind, and that if the generations among whom it at first appeared had lived now, they would have reasoned to better purpose. For the productions of *that* age are the admiration of *this*; in works of taste and imagination it has never been surpassed, and it is sometimes considered as the highest praise of writers of the present day, that they exhibit a near approach to the inimitable beauties of the authors who then flourished. The earth was, therefore, in a state to receive this precious seed; He who appoints the seasons, and brings on seed-time and harvest, saw that this was a proper time in which to plant that tree of righteousness which was to stretch wide its branches till it overshadowed the world, and whose fruit was to be "for the healing of the nations."

The fulness of the time was come:—Hence we remark that the event here referred to was the most important that had ever distinguished the annals of the world. The epoch will arrive when this world will be thought of as nothing but as it has furnished a stage for the "manifestation of the Son of God;" when his birth, his death, his resurrection from the dead, his ascension to glory, and his second appearance, events inseparably connected, will concentrate within themselves all the interest of history; when war and peace, and pestilence and famine, and plenty and want, and life and death, will have spent their force, and leave nothing but the result, the permanent, eternal result of Christ's manifestation upon earth; when every other distinction which has marked the individuals, or generations, of our race shall be swept away, and all shall be alike distinguished in the annals of the universe by the new and awful character of being associated in the same nature with the Son of God. In the effects of this gracious interposition you are all interested; of its fruits you are invited to partake; you may now reject the offer, you may now refuse this great salvation, but the period of neglect will soon be over—you may now think lightly of the Saviour, but these thoughts will soon be ended. The moment

you enter eternity you will see things as they are; the greatness of Christ will present itself to your eye, the vastness of his redemption, the importance of his mediatorial work, the infinite felicity of being saved, the unspeakable misery of being lost,—the thoughts of these will dwell with you for ever. Those who now neglect the gospel will never cease to curse the infatuation of putting away from them the proffered mercy, and judging themselves unworthy of everlasting life. Now, with drowsy attention, with thoughts dissipated amidst a crowd of vanities, you hear the record of this great doctrine; you have Christ set forth by his ministers as crucified among you; you hear with listless and careless minds these glad tidings, that "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." But let eternity disclose itself to your view; let a short period be past either in the enjoyment of the beatific vision of God, or in the dark regions of despair, and how will these subjects then appear? Eternity will not be too long either to rue that neglect which has plucked down ruin on yourselves, or to rejoice in that grace of God which has made you wise unto salvation. All the happiness, and splendour, and glory, which shall then be realized by all the ransomed people of God, are so many fruits of the purchase by Christ's death. There is not single blessing which shall then be enjoyed which is not to be ascribed to the love of Christ in dying for our iniquities, and "washing us from our sins in his own blood."

"What think you of Christ?" The time will come when you *must* think very seriously of him. Some of you, I trust, have thought of him to great and happy effect, have trusted your salvation in his hands, and are "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of God." Remember that whatever be the state of your hearts towards him, you *must* stand at his judgment seat; at his tribunal we *must* all appear, to give an account of the reception we have given to his apostles, to his ministers, to the words of eternal life contained in

this book. Then those only will have peace and joy who will possess the consciousness that they have embraced Christ; that they have trusted in him in life and in death, have walked in communion with him, kept his precepts, imitated his example, and laid up all their hopes in him, as the Saviour of sinners.

I cannot close without reminding every person present of the awful consequences of remaining under the law. Recollect, wherever you are, that if you are not vital believers in Christ, if you know not what it is to have trusted your souls in his hands, and to be justified by faith in his blood, you are under the law. Rejoice not as others rejoice, you have nothing to do with joy; it would be madness in you to taste of joy till this grand impediment to your happiness is removed. If you are under the curse of God, what have you to do with joy? The joy of a maniac dancing in his chains, the joy of a criminal on his way to execution, is reasonable in comparison with the joy of the man who says, "Soul, take thine ease," whilst the wrath of God hangs over him, and he knows not how soon it may fall.

Let us, then, all flee to the Saviour; let us, without delay, lay hold of the great atonement; thus shall we "be justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses." Christ is ready to receive us; Christ says to every one, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Oh, "seek ye, then, the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

XXI.

POINTS OF AGREEMENT IN THE STATE OF THE RICH AND THE POOR.*

[PREACHED AT CAMBRIDGE, SEPTEMBER 20, 1829.]

PROVERBS xxii. 2.—*The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all*

THIS book consists of a number of short sentences and aphorisms, that relate to human life and manners, and to virtue and vice. It is not necessary for us to attempt to trace any particular connexion between the passage which has just been read and the surrounding context. What was the train of thought by which the inspired writer was conducted from one of these truths to another, it is unnecessary anxiously to inquire. It is obvious there was some law of association which governed his mind, though it eludes every attempt at investigation on our part, and would lead us into a useless and intricate research. The doctrine which is to be deduced from the words you have just heard read, is, however, worthy of our most serious regard. It declares there is a natural equality in mankind, notwithstanding the diversified appearances of some of them, and the different stations they are destined to occupy in the present condition of being: it assures us that the rich and the poor meet together, that they coincide and agree in many of the most important circumstances, and that the differences which appear to exist between them are, for the most part, of a superficial, and therefore of a transitory nature. "The Lord is the maker of them all." The sacred writer thus introduces all of us into an equal and common relation to God, who is the great Parent of us all. We are the creatures of the same hand, the subjects of the same government; we occupy the same economy of divine providence; and, as to our destination,

* Printed from the Notes of J. R. Mills, Esq.

we all stand in relation to the same future and eternal state of being. These two distinctions and divisions of society have existed in every period. It is impossible to avoid them: and any attempt to establish an equality of possessions in the present world, would be replete with disappointment, confusion, rapine, and misery. The greatest disturbances mankind has ever experienced, have arisen from abortive attempts of this nature: nor can any one seriously consider the causes from which these two conditions of society spring, but he must despair of ever realizing any thing like equality, or any thing approaching to equality, as to the possessions and enjoyments of the present state.

It has been urged in favour of such attempts, and with some degree of plausibility, that a scheme of this kind was executed at the first beginning of Christianity, that the saints at Jerusalem had nothing which they called their own, but threw their property into a common stock; and out of that stock they relieved the distress and poverty of their persecuted brethren. But there is great reason to conclude, as Mosheim* has very judiciously shown, that there was no such thing as community of goods established among them, and that the right of property was not formally relinquished; but that it was customary for all who possessed property, to hold themselves in readiness to relieve the exigencies of those who applied to them. It does not appear that it was ever hinted at by the apostles themselves, who were at Jerusalem, or made even a temporary law of that church; but every one was left to act agreeably to the dictates of his own mind: and the apostle Peter aggravates the guilt of Ananias and Sapphira, by declaring, that while the estate "was in their own possession, was it not their own; and after it was sold, was it not in their own power;" and that no necessity existed for resorting to falsehood, when they laid the price of it at the feet of the apostles. It never prevailed in any other church. We have no intimation that it was adopted in any other

* See his "Commentaries on the Affairs of the Christians," (Vidal's translation,) vol. i. p. 202, and the reference there made.—ED.

of the great churches, which were planted by the apostle Paul; and in his epistles there is no reference to any similar regulation, though he alludes there to a large collection, which himself and the other apostles were engaged in making in those churches, for relieving the distress of the saints of Jerusalem. The pressure of calamity was local and temporary, it was occasioned by peculiar circumstances of time and place, and never pervaded the other parts of Christendom. It never was made a law by the apostle Paul; nor, as a permanent regulation, was it countenanced by the apostles at Jerusalem.

It would be wasting your time, to spend more words in pointing out the folly and absurdity of every attempt to equalize the possessions of mankind. I am persuaded there are none here, that permit themselves to be deluded by the sophistries of the designing and wicked who propagate this notion. But it is of great importance for us to consider, because it is intimately connected with our duties and prospects, in what great points the rich and poor meet together, and that the Lord is the maker of them all: that each of these respective classes may learn their proper duties to one another, that the poor may learn not to envy and murmur, and the rich not to despise and oppress. Then will society be happy, when the poor and the rich unite in spirit to promote the great purposes of social order and happiness, in entire and equal subjection to the Father of spirits, who is the fountain and source of every good.

In considering this subject permit me to observe,

I. That the rich and the poor meet together *in the participation of a common nature.* They are equal sharers in the common nature of humanity, in distinction from those who are in a lower, and from those who are in a higher order of beings. The faculties by which this nature makes itself known, are exhibited with equal clearness, and certainty, and activity, in both these classes. The poor as well as the rich give the most unequivocal indications of the possession of that reason, which is the grand distinction of man, and forms the

chief difference between mankind and the beasts that perish. Reason may be cultivated to a higher extent by some of the rich, in consequence of the more improved education which they may procure, and of the leisure which their station commands. But decisive indications of a reasonable nature are presented in the lowest walks of society; and they are sometimes such as greatly to surpass and eclipse the indications of intellect in the higher classes. Every age of society has produced persons who have broken through the difficulties and disadvantages of their station; who have surmounted the obstacles by which they were surrounded, and have reached a high position in a career of virtuous probation among those who have set out on a more elevated stage. And, on the contrary, among the sons of opulence, some have been found who possess such an imbecility as no education could remedy; their knowledge has never been of any use to them; and the learning which has been bestowed upon them has rather been an incumbrance than an assistance to them: their knowledge has remained a dead mass, which the mind could never animate,—a sort of raw produce, out of which nothing useful or ornamental to society could be extracted. When this imbecility has prevailed to a certain extent, so as to invite a comparison with the degree of knowledge which the mind is capable of attaining, it shows its native disadvantage, and is never more conspicuous than in the case of those who unite a large portion of human attainment with a portion of radical imbecility.

The poor and the rich have equally the power of ascertaining general principles, of forming conclusions as to the future from the consideration of past events, and of rendering their senses conducive to those general and abstract ideas in which all real science and knowledge consists. Thus you see that the poor and the rich, in the great faculty of the understanding, afford proofs of equality; and no difference exists between them but such as may be easily accounted for by the circumstances of human life.

With respect to their moral sensibilities also, the rich

and the poor meet together. They possess alike that conscience which "either accuses or excuses," and they possess that cognizance of the purposes and intents of the mind, which connects it with a system of legislation, with the hope of reward, or the fear of punishment. The poorest, as well as the richest, is capable of feeling these sentiments. The hopes and the fears of a future world act as powerfully upon the poor as upon the rich; and that legislation which appeals to the conscience, and which refers to the primary distinctions of the human mind between right and wrong, is calculated to take as much hold of the one as of the other.

In regard, also, to devotion, which by some men of profound thought is declared to be the great characteristic of man, in opposition to the brutes that perish, these two classes meet together. There are many examples, among the poor, of persons who are "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love him." In the poorest breast we find the flame of devotion burn; and with an intenseness and purity as great as in those who are more exalted. Though the latter may have some advantages in the greater extent of their knowledge, that deficiency is frequently compensated to the former, by a greater simplicity and unity of attention, and by their entire devotedness to one object. It is a question of much difficulty to determine which of these stations is more favourable to the cultivation of piety, and whether poverty, with all its destitution, is a greater hindrance to the divine life than affluence, with all its temptations. A course of piety is *difficult* for all, but *practicable* for every individual; and the light of eternity alone can decide whose situation has been the most hazardous, and whose the most favourable, to the growth of religion.

The rich and the poor meet together in the primary passions of the human mind, which give birth to whatever is most distinguishing in man: and these are found in the same state in the rich and in the poor, essentially considered. The exhibition of them by the latter is more private, giving birth to good purposes; but with

regard to the former, the exhibition of them is more public, because they stand in more powerful and exalted stations, and act on a more extended stage. If we trace the passions of men to their primary elements, we shall find the virtues and vices of the poor and of the rich spring from the same sources. The guilty passions that agitate the breast of the peasant, and lead him to disturb the peace of his neighbourhood, are of the same nature with those that disturb the tranquillity of nations, in the breasts of princes. The same injustice, the same low ambition, the same love of acquiring that which is not his own, that renders a peasant a nuisance to the village where he resides, renders an unjust prince the terror of his subjects, the source of iniquitous wars, and a stain and reproach to his species. The person who, in the poorest situation, in a peasant's cottage, is led by a love of order, and by native benevolence of mind, to diffuse peace and comfort around his own circle, and, so far as his influence extends, in his own neighbourhood, evinces the same spirit with the individual who would diffuse peace and order through a distracted empire, and who lays the foundation of tranquillity for distant ages, by the enactment of the most wholesome regulations and the most enlightened laws.

The more we analyse actions, and trace them to their primary elements, the more we shall perceive the identity between the rich and the poor, as to their intellectual, moral, accountable, and devotional capacities. The rich and the poor occupy the same department of the universe: they are subjects of the same moral government, and are destined to be judged equally and impartially, by the same laws, at the final and awful distribution of reward to the just and to the unjust.

II. I would observe that the rich and the poor meet together *in the process of the same social economy*, in the same necessary intercourse of human life; they are closely connected with each other, and equally form parts of the same human family. It is impossible for us to say which of these subdivisions of society is, in its place, the most important; which of them ought to be

most respected; which of them most cherished. The higher can by no means say to the lower, with truth or propriety, "I have no need of thee;" nor can the lower retort upon the higher, "I have no need of thee." If the lower order occupy the place of the feet and hands, which execute the purposes of the mind, the higher occupy the place of the head, which is the seat of counsel, and is necessary for the direction and preservation of the whole social body. Here we see how necessary both these classes are to the general order, and to the diffusion of peace and happiness throughout the whole. According to the degree in which this is felt, in proportion as the industrious citizen, the ingenious mechanic, or the laborious husbandman who cultivates the soil, in any community, is destitute of encouragement, society languishes; and in proportion to the reasonable, not redundant, remuneration of labour to the industrious classes of the community, is the diffusion of comfort and enjoyment through the whole body.

The higher classes must, on reflection, perceive, that they are indebted to the lower for all they enjoy. The distinctions of wealth, and stations of authority, which they are so proud to display, and by which the higher classes are raised above the poor, are supported by the produce of the field and of art; and these are combined by the hand of honest labour, in such processes, as the ingenuity of the lower classes has devised. "The king himself is served by the field." Those higher classes are supported by the continual machine of labour, which is going on among the inferior classes of society; and, were it to stop, it would tend to the stagnation, instead of the steady flow, of luxurious enjoyment among those higher classes. The poor might here, with greater propriety than the rich, adopt the language of an early apologist for christianity, and say, "Were we to retire from you, you would be astonished at your own desolation; we should leave you little but your temples and your gods."* There may be some who might not choose to

* Mr. Hall here evidently referred to the language of the celebrated Tertullian, *Apologet*, cap. xxxvii. "Hesterni sumus, et vestra omnia

adopt the language of this statement; but it is not too much for the poor to say to the rich. Were they to retire, no mind can adequately portray the lengths and depths of that desolation and misery, which would be sustained by all else, but especially by those in the higher walks of life. In vain would they retain wealth, if there were no hands to be employed; and, were no commodities of any kind presented to them, they would live in a state of destitution, greater than the meanest of their dependents, or they must endeavour to apply themselves separately to those arts, each of which, in order to produce in perfection what they value, is the business of a life. The pinnacles of the proudest edifice rest on a basis, that comes into immediate contact with the surface of the earth, or is buried partly under it, and is invisible: so, all the improvements of wealth, nay, all the distinctions of royal grandeur, rest on the industry of the poor, upon their silent, unperceived industry, working out of the view, and frequently out of the contemplation, of those who are most indebted to it. Let no one look with contempt on the meanest of his fellow-creatures, on account of his having to gain his bread "by the sweat of his brow." That was the appointed lot of our first parents after their fall, and it was the condition of *all* in the primitive state of society. It is

implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, conciliabula, castra ipsa, tribus, decurias, palatium, senatum, forum. *Sola vobis relinquimus templa.*" There may probably be, as is sometimes conjectured, a little overcharge of rhetorical exaggeration in this; yet, whoever meditates upon the report made by the circumspect and prudent Pliny to the emperor Trajan (Lib. x. Ep. 97), will perceive that even in his time, at least in the Pontic province, the christians far outnumbered the heathen worshippers. "Multi omnis ætatis, *omnis ordinis,* utriusque sexus etiam, vocantur in periculum et vocabuntur. Neque civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam atque agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est." From what follows, it is evident, too, that heathenism had been in great peril, and the temples nearly forsaken:—"*Certè satis constat, propè jam desolata templa cœpisse celebrari,* et sacra solemnia diu intermissa repeti, passimque venire victimas, quarum adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur." This, however, by the way: for though it bears upon an important point in the history of christianity it falls not within the scope of this sermon.—Ed.

to the industry of the lower classes, that the distinctions and splendour of the highest are to be entirely ascribed.

On the other hand, let not the poor say to the rich, "we have no need of you." Were they to retire, the effects would be of a very different kind, but they would be equally melancholy. The destruction of the social fabric would be the infallible result. That wisdom which is necessary for the good of the whole, is found in persons of exalted station. There is the mind that casts its eye over the whole machine of society, discovers its abuses, and aims to correct them; the mind which watches over the execution of the law, gives birth to splendid examples, and refines and embellishes whatever it embraces. It comprehends the order of civil government, and those principles whose operation harmonizes all. These are founded on wisdom, deliberation, and experience, and on the force with which public opinion arms those who are placed in elevated stations. Each of these classes, then, is, in its separate place, essential to the welfare of society; and the whole has for its basis the industry of the poor. Were all those, who by their leisure are able to cultivate their own minds, to diffuse the knowledge of true morality, and embellish the manners of mankind, by engrafting new improvements, giving existence to wholesome laws, and seeing them properly executed, what a paradise would the world become!

* * * * * *

These considerations will more than reconcile us to that inequality in the condition of society, which for the most part prevails; they will lead us to admire the infinite wisdom of God, who has implanted those principles which tend to give security and happiness to all, to the poor as well as the rich. By these means society is really united together; so that, while every one is consulting his own interest, he is at the same time promoting the interest of the whole, even more entirely and effectually, than he could have done, if he had separately and intentionally devoted himself to it; and each acquires, by the force of his industry, what no compulsory distri-

bution of labour could possibly have secured. You see how admirable is the wisdom displayed in such a constitution of society, as by the union of its parts under the administration of a wise government, renders every individual, who acts most agreeably to his own interest, at the same time the promoter of the public good. Such a state of society could by no possibility be produced by any technical or mechanical arrangements. The infinite wisdom of God works out this order from the selfish passions of men, and leads each, from a consideration of his own interests in his own station, to operate most effectually for the general benefit. Were those who live in the higher stations of society to lavish all that could be spared from their own expenditure by the most rigid parsimony, and apply it in mere almsgiving, it would be infinitely more injurious than their indulging in even the luxuries of their station: and the proper outlay of their wealth, in the conveniences and comforts of life, is productive of infinitely more good, and of an order of good more than equivalent to any, which an expenditure to the same amount in almsgiving and charity could effect. The rich, enjoying with moderation that affluence which God has put into their hands, without allowing their reason to be inflamed with pride and sensuality, and every one enjoying the good things of this life, at the same time preserving the power of meeting the exigencies of others, much more contributes to the healthful state of society, than the largest distribution of almsgiving, were such an exhibition of enjoyment and wealth to cease; and the poor, while only earning their bread "by the sweat of their brow," lend themselves to the diffusion of happiness and comfort over the whole.

III. We remark that the rich and poor meet together *in the house of God.* If there be a place, and a time, where those sentiments should be suspended, and at which the emotions connected with the operation of riches and poverty, and the conduct to which they give rise, should suffer a temporary pause, the house of God is precisely that place, and the worship of God, that time; when the rich should forget they are rich, and

where the poor should forget they are poor; where they are called to reflect upon that original equality in which mankind was created. In the presence of the great and good Being, they should forget all their distinctions, and recollect their essential relation to Him who is equally the Father of all mankind.

James, when he was addressing the poor and the rich who were under the influence of christian principles, says, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich in that he is made low; because, as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways." The rich man, if he is a christian, will rejoice in that he is made low; will rejoice in returning to the presence of his God, under a sense of his nothingness, and with a consciousness of meriting nothing: this ought to be the experience of every one who is approaching the footstool of the Divine Majesty. The poor man, on the contrary, delights in being truly exalted. He reflects that he is adopted into that family, of which all the saints "in heaven and earth are named;" he rejoices in the presence of the rich, under a sense of spiritual elevation. The rich descends, in the presence of the poor, into a voluntary humiliation. The one feels the pleasure of descending, while he reflects on his meanness and guilt as a sinner, and lays aside the consideration of all that might have a tendency to lift him up in his own eyes; and the other finds unspeakable consolation in losing sight of his poverty, and in contemplating only the ineffable dignity to which he is exalted as a child of God, a believer in Christ, and an heir of glory. Into the presence of the Divine Being they do not come as rich and poor. It is no part of their business, it is not fit for the occasion on which they are convened. They are convened on common ground, under a deep sense of the necessities of their common nature. Apart from any relations they bear to each other, they prostrate themselves before the infinite God, they depre-

cate the anger which none can sustain, but which they have equally merited; which is not to be shunned by human arrangements, or by the efforts of human power and influence; they supplicate that mercy which is equally revealed to the rich and to the poor, and which is the only stay and support of a sinking universe. That mercy is divinely free, through the sacrifice and blood of the divine Son. They strengthen themselves for their race, which will terminate, as to all, in an everlasting condition of glory or of woe. In imitation of the holy apostles, they gather fresh grace as they approach Him who is the fountain of grace. They implore the fulfilment of his promises, and the influences of that Spirit who is equally necessary to sanctify the body of the elect of God, to whatever stations they belong, or by whatever variety of fortune they may be distinguished. They look forward to that "new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," and to those loveliest regions of light and glory, where all the distinctions of the present life will be entirely forgotten, where the meanest will have a portion with the most elevated in the favour of God, and "a crown of immortal glory." In this sacred presence all mean and transitory distinctions are lost sight of, are levelled; all mankind feel themselves on one common footing, and prostrate themselves in the presence of the Divine Majesty, who is all in all. There "the poor man rejoices in that he is exalted, and the rich in that he is made low."

A very celebrated poet and nobleman, who died some years ago, was in the habit of attending a prayer-meeting in the country village where he lived, and where a few poor people were accustomed to assemble to seek the especial presence of God. It was at first customary for these humble persons to make way for him, if he happened to come in a little after the appointed time; but he expressed his unwillingness to receive these marks of attention and respect, and said, he should be contented if he were left to occupy the lowest station. In other places he claimed for himself, and thought he had a right to claim, the distinctions of his rank; but

there he felt himself in the same situation with themselves. In this state of mind he entered into the genuine feelings of christianity. He delighted to come into the presence of that Being, who levels all distinctions; He who smites the proud with a stroke which can never be survived, and has declared his judgement of the humble and contrite in terms which can never be forgotten.

They who cherish other sentiments are forgetful that it is the same Great Being who is the protector of all his poor, and who regards with contempt those who despise others that are permanently afflicted with adverse fortune. In the divine presence each of these distinctions is alike lost sight of; and all true Christians will at last be brought to feel their relation to one common Father, as heirs of the same inheritance. There is "one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father of all." They embrace each other as fellow-heirs of the same eternal inheritance. Let us, therefore, enter into the presence of God more under the influence of christian sentiments. Let the poor forget themselves as poor, and consider themselves as rich in being children of God, and heirs of heaven. Let the rich recollect his wealth only as a trust with which he is charged. Let him forget all but his responsibility, and that will constitute a motive to humility in the presence of Almighty God. The utility of divine worship in this case appears most evident. The sentiments it calls forth, are such as hinder our running into the excesses to which we are exposed: and nothing is more salutary or wholesome, than that temporary suspension of undue notions of rank, which is derived from an approach to that Being with whom all are on a level, whose majesty fills heaven and earth, and in whose presence nothing can be exalted, except as he draws it towards himself. As I perceive the time is advancing, I shall not enlarge on these considerations, but advert very briefly to one or two remaining particulars. I will add,

IV. That the rich and poor meet together *in the circumstances of their entrance into this world, and in the*

circumstances of their exit out of it. We have beheld the identity of human nature, notwithstanding the artificial disguises which these distinctions bestow for a time. Look at the great man in his origin. Look at him as he comes into this world, and say whether you can detect the least difference between the offspring of the peasant and of the prince. They come into the world under marks of the same destitution, and weakness, and misery. Both alike enter with cries expressive of distress, as if conscious of their arrival in a valley of tears. Both would close their eyes in darkness, were it not for the breasts that give them suck, and the knees that sustain them. Both are indebted to aliment which nature has administered to the mother for the support of her children; and both, by the tenderness excited by their cries and tears, gain access to a mother's care, and to a father's heart. The Deity has provided no outward physiognomy to distinguish the rich and the poor: and no inquisitive eye can discover to which of these classes any new-born infant is likely to belong.

Let us here trace the progress of their being farther until we come to their final exit, and to their departure out of this world. In some of the most important particulars they entirely coincide as to the circumstances of their departure hence. At the moment when they quit this state of being the poor man lays aside his poverty, the rich man lays aside all the appendages of riches, his grandeur, and dignity; all are alike deposited by the possessor before he passes to the mysterious and eternal bourn. No man goes into the invisible world, no man retires to the sepulchre, without dropping the distinction of riches and poverty. The rich man, it is true, is carried to the tomb by mourners, whether real or artificial; and though survivors endeavour to maintain the distinctions of rank and elevated station in the region of destruction and mortality, yet all is in vain. They wage a fruitless war with corruption and decay. The inscription first disappears; then the monument moulders into ruin; the dust itself is scattered or mingled with surrounding earth, and the last place that knew the dead, "knows

him no more for ever." The very names of those who have most disturbed the peace of society, and have been a terror to their species while living, are heard of no more. It is left to the antiquary of a future age to speculate upon the import of the remaining letters that composed a part of their names. Where are the men of genius that lived before the flood? They have retired from the memory of mankind; history records of them only that they lived and that they died, and leaves all the rest to be filled up by conjecture and imagination.

V. This subject reminds us of that period when all the pomp and distinctions of the universe shall coincide in one point, melt into one entire mass, and present themselves in one vision. The time is coming when the rich and poor will not only meet as to the circumstances of their dying hour, but as to their allotted state and condition of being. We have seen both going to the grave. Alike they occupy the place appointed for all living; alike they seek kindred with corruption, earth, and worms. But they will appear again; and they will appear again for purposes that were never accomplished before. They will appear for the purpose of undergoing a serious review by the Master that created them, who fixed their class, and appointed their station. They will appear to account "for the deeds done in the body." Then it will be found, that many a person has occupied a station which he was not fitted to occupy; that he possessed talents which he was not willing to employ; and that he wore a character which he was not qualified to sustain. Then the Great Governor of the whole will take a review of his creatures; he will recast their parts; he will suffer none to appear but in their proper character; and the distinction of his approbation will, in no degree, turn on the transient distinctions in their present circumstances as rich and poor. The poor who has been the servant of the Most High will be made rich. No obscurity will be felt, but his lustre will be as the sun shining in his strength. Instead of persecution and oppression, he shall receive "a crown of life that fadeth not away." The rich man who was a despiser of

God, shall, at the same time,—so far from obtaining an interest in the favour of the Great Sovereign of the world,—if he looks back on the talents which he has perverted, on the opportunities he has lost, and on the force of his influence which he has not employed for the great ends of his being in serving God, and in serving his generation, he shall curse his wealth, which was the source of crime to himself and others; and will see in it a weight only sinking him lower in perdition.

The rich who have been the persecutors of the children of God, will then, in the utmost agony, lament their crime, and will "call upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb." The purpose for which the Divine Being will then manifest himself is such, as it was never attempted to accomplish before,—for *the trial of the actions of men.* As they are now displayed, they can only be judged upon incompetent evidence, and often upon defective principles; but then the whole character will be weighed in the balance: the destiny of every man will be adjusted, and determined, for ever. The Divine Being will sit in judgement upon every man, in order to divide mankind into two eternal states; to banish one class to the regions of darkness and despair, and to receive the other to himself; "they shall enter through the gates into the city, and reign with Him and with his Son for ever and ever."

I shall attempt a very brief improvement of this subject, by addressing a few considerations to each of the classes mentioned in the text. Let such as are rich recollect they are rich for the purpose of benefiting their generation, and that they are "the servants of the most high God." "We are not our own, but are bought with a price;" let us glorify God, whose we are, and whom we are bound to serve. These are the sentiments of every disciple of Christ, but they are not the sentiments of every one who now hears me. There are, probably, some unhappy, miserable men, who are not the disciples of Christ. Let each person estimate himself in the sight of God by this consideration: is he living to himself, or is he living to Christ? Is he living for the pur-

pose of luxurious enjoyment?—he is walking in a vain show, and not discharging his appropriate duty, not considering his riches as the means of doing good, as talents wherewith he is to profit, and which he must occupy till the Master come. He does not consider that they are not his own; he does not use them as one who bears in mind that divine price by which he has been bought. He has no true respect to that authority under which he acts; nor does he pay allegiance to the only King of kings, and Lord of lords. We must all stand before his tribunal: God himself will be the judge. He has committed all judgement into the hands of that very Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all.

Let such persons consider seriously whether they are living to themselves or to God. Let them consider that, if they are living to themselves, they miss the very end of their being; they are committing a mistake which can never be repaired; they are guilty of an error which admits of no correction. They mistake the end of their being, which consists in glorifying God, in acquiring his image, in fulfilling his will, and in laying up treasures in heaven. They commit such an error as no human folly can equal, such as no human virtue can expiate. This is a condemning error; this is the fatal and awful mistake of men; that they live as their own, while the voice of God, the dictates of conscience, the blood of Christ, the precepts of the Spirit of truth, and the opening light of eternity, all show that "we are not our own:" they show that we are the creatures of another, the possession of another. Our Lord *will come forth;* he will discover all who have lived to themselves, he will take account of "the quick and the dead; and all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation." Let those who are rich remember that, as christians, it behoves them who possess riches not to fail in good works. Let them act from christian principles, and with christian motives, and with a view to christian reward. Let them recollect that they are

bound to ascertain whether they are christians. Till we are christians, we cannot serve God as christians: we can serve God only in that state which belongs to us. Till we are christians, we cannot pay due regard to his will, we cannot act with a view to his glory, nor according to the instructions of his word, nor can we seriously expect that eternal life, which rests no where but on his promise, which he will fulfil to "all that love his appearing." Let it be the care of all in the presence of God in this assembly that they be christians; let them secure a portion among the saints; let them see that they have a place among the people of God; that they are united to Him "of whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named." Let them seek to be renewed, regenerated, and sanctified, and washed in the atoning blood of the Saviour, to be made members of Christ, and heirs of his kingdom; to be fitted and prepared for his eternal glory. Let them seek to be vessels of honour, sanctified by the Spirit of God, and fit for the Master's use,—fit to serve him in the lower functions of his temple on earth, and to serve him hereafter in his eternal kingdom and glory. What will it avail any of us to possess now what we must then cease to possess; what we can possess only till we arrive at the threshold of death, and shall look back on the distinctions which must then have vanished; when we lay down our bodies in the grave, and have nothing before us but a vast eternity, the complexion of which will be decided by the will of another,—by the will of that Being who sees not with the eyes of flesh and blood, before whom riches and poverty, wisdom and folly, and all physical distinctions are nothing: who will regard nothing in his creatures but the will to please him, and obedience to that will? The happiness to be obtained by faith will be infinitely superior to the happiness which is derived from the objects of sense. For a man thus to lose his own soul, will be to sacrifice the great end of his being.

But there are some here to whom the possession of riches is sanctified, who consider them as a great trust, for the use of which they are responsible, and who

are asking, What shall I do? What return shall I make to God for all his benefits? and who tremble, lest at the final account they should be found unfaithful stewards. They trust in the Saviour; they cultivate communion with God; they condescend to men of low estate; they are rich in good works; they lay up a good foundation for the time to come; they will surmount the perils of the most prosperous fortune; they will combine the riches of this world with the riches of glory; they will be distinguished in both worlds, standing complete and ready for their Master's will; they are armed for the combat in the present state, and fitted at any moment to take wing, to "depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Happy those who, while they have abundance of the things of this world, have also a treasure elsewhere! While they walk in light, and glory, and reputation on earth, they seek first the honour that cometh from above; they seek, indeed, *no higher honour* than that which comes from Him who is the arbiter of the destinies of all.

Let me now say a word to the poor. If they are poor, and yet partakers of true piety springing from the faith of the gospel, let them not repine. Let them indulge no envious thought at those who possess more of this world's goods than is allotted to themselves. To such I would say, Recollect that your happiness depends not on the station in life which you occupy, but on the manner in which you perform its duties. A small circle is not less complete than a large one: a humble field of occupation, yielding proper fruits in their season, will be recognized by God and approved of men. You will have the testimony of your conscience that "in simplicity, and godly sincerity, you have your conversation in the world." You will leave a testimony behind you of the power of religion: your remains will breathe a sweet odour in all the churches of which you formed a part: you will dignify a low station, you will rescue it from all reproach; for the reproach consists not in poverty, but in yielding to the temptations of poverty. Riches, in themselves, confer no lasting honour, but as they are accompanied

by a resistance to their peculiar temptations. You are walking in the footsteps of "the Lord of all," who, when he came into the world, made poverty his abode, became a companion of fishermen, and at length a com panion of sinners on the cross. Let such as are poor seek to be "rich in faith:" let them exult and rejoice in the prospect of future happiness: let them rise above the sorrows of time in the contemplation of the glory which awaits them. Your recompense is above; your pleasures are in heaven. If you are real christians, you would not relinquish one portion in heaven for all the happiness of the present state. Avoid every temptation to dishonesty, to prevarication, to envy, to murmuring, to discontent. Avoid all those temptations which arise from a narrow and scanty fortune. Show how religion can dignify the lowest station in society, and do all possible honour to that station. Thousands of saints have done this. Our Saviour illustrated the sorrows and privations of poverty; and, if you are animated by his spirit, you will walk in his steps; and after having suffered with him here, you will be also glorified together with him, and reign with him for ever and ever.

FRAGMENTS.

DEFENCE OF VILLAGE PREACHING,

HINTS ON TOLERATION,

THE RIGHT OF WORSHIP, &c.

[Written in 1801, 1802, and 1811.]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

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NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

The disquisition, of which the interesting Fragments now presented to the public are alone preserved, was commenced in 1801. About that time the late Bishop Horsley advanced the opinion, in various charges and sermons, (extracts from one of which are subjoined in a note,)* that the dissenters

* Extracts from Bishop Horsley's Charge, published in 1800.

After observing that the laity of England have as little relish for Socinianism as for Atheism, and that they think much alike of him who openly disowns the Son, and of him who denies the Father; insomuch that the advocates of this blasphemy have preached themselves out of all credit with the people, he proceeds as follows:—

"Still the operations of the enemy are going on; still going on by stratagem. The stratagem still a pretence of Reformation. But the Reformation the very reverse of what was before attempted. Instead of divesting religion of its mysteries, and reducing it to a mere philosophy in speculation, and a mere morality in practice, the plan is now to affect a great zeal for orthodoxy; to make great pretensions to an extraordinary measure of the Holy Spirit's influence; to alienate the minds of the people from the established clergy, by representing them as sordid worldlings; without any concern about the souls of men; indifferent to the religion which they ought to teach, and to which the laity are attached, and destitute of the Spirit of God. In many parts of the kingdom conventicles have been opened in great numbers, and congregations formed of one knows not what denomination. The pastor is often, in appearance at least, an illiterate peasant or mechanic. The congregation is visited occasionally by preachers from a distance. Sunday schools are opened in connexion with these conventicles. There is much reason to suspect that the expenses of these schools and conventicles are defrayed by associations formed in different places. For the preachers and schoolmasters are observed to engage in expenses for the support and advancement of their institutions, to which, if we may judge from appearances, their own means must be altogether inadequate. The poor are even bribed, by small pecuniary gifts from time to time, to send their children to these schools of they know not what, rather than to those connected with the established church, in which they would be bred in the prin-

and methodists, in their attempts to introduce the preaching of the gospel in villages where evangelical doctrines were not taught in the established church, were actuated by what were then termed "jacobinical" motives, and by a desire to overthrow the episcopalian form of church government. This opinion, repeatedly announced in the oracular tone too often assumed by that learned prelate, obtained an extraordinary currency; and there was every reason to fear that some strong legislative measures for the prevention of these encroachments (as they were regarded) upon the functions of a parish minister, would be adopted. The necessity of such

ciples of true religion and loyalty. It is very remarkable that these new congregations of nondescripts have been mostly formed since the Jacobins have been laid under the restraints of those two most salutary statutes commonly known by the names of the Sedition and Treason Bills; a circumstance which gives much ground for suspicion that sedition and Atheism are the real objects of these institutions, rather than religion. Indeed, in some places this is known to be the case. In one topic the teachers of all these congregations agree; abuse of the established clergy, as negligent of their flocks, cold in their preaching, and destitute of the Spirit. In this they are joined by persons of a very different caste; whom a candour of which they, on their part, set but a poor example, is unwilling to suspect of any ill design; though it is difficult to acquit them of the imputation of an indiscretion in their zeal, which, in its consequences, may be productive of mischief very remote, I believe, from their intention. It is a dreadful aggravation of the dangers of the present crisis in this country, that persons of real piety should, without knowing it, be lending their aid to the common enemy, and making themselves, in effect, accomplices in a conspiracy against the Lord and against his Christ. The Jacobins of this country, I very much fear, are, at this moment, making a tool of Methodism, just as the illuminées of Bavaria made a tool of free-masonry; while the real Methodist, like the real free-mason, is kept in utter ignorance of the wicked enterprise the counterfeit has in hand." Pp. 18—20.

In page 25, &c. the Bishop corrects a misrepresentation of a speech delivered by him in the House of Lords, and gives the following as a faithful statement of it. "I said," says he, "that schools of Jacobinical religion and Jacobinical politics; that is to say, schools of Atheism and disloyalty, abound in this country;—schools in the shape and disguise of charity;—schools and Sunday schools, in which the minds of the children of the very lowest orders are enlightened; that is to say, taught to despise religion, and the laws, and all subordination.—This I know to be the fact. But, the proper antidote for the poison of the Jacobinical schools, will be schools for children of the same class under the management of the parochial clergy:—Sunday schools, therefore, under your own inspection, I would advise you to encourage." P. 26.

measures was urged again and again, with the utmost violence and intolerance, in several of the daily and other periodical publications; so that considerable apprehensions were naturally entertained that these exertions of christian benevolence would be altogether checked, or greatly restricted.

In such a state of things Mr. Hall commenced this essay: but, the public ebullition subsiding, he relinquished his design of publication, and indeed destroyed a portion of what he had written.

In the years 1810 and 1811, the friends of village preaching by dissenters, and of Sunday schools under their superintendence, were again alarmed by a fresh attempt to restrain their operations, though not undertaken in a hostile spirit, in an act brought into parliament by Lord *Sidmouth*. His Lordship proposed some new restrictions upon persons who wished to qualify as dissenting teachers, and others, either by separate licence, or by some other method, thought to be appropriate, on itinerant preaching. He also proposed to deprive lay-preachers of certain exemptions which had hitherto been granted. Against these measures petitions were sent to parliament from all parts of the kingdom; and the bill, being opposed by Lords *Grey, Holland, Erskine, Liverpool, Moira, Stanhope*, by Dr. Manners Sutton, then *Archbishop of Canterbury*, and by *Lord Chancellor Eldon*, was lost May 21st, 1811, on the motion of Lord *Erskine*, which was agreed to without a division. The minds of those classes of the public that were interested in the diffusion of evangelical knowledge among the poor, were however, agitated by this question for several months. In such a state of things, Mr. Hall determined to revise and complete what he had formerly begun; but the failure of Lord Sidmouth's plan induced him again to lay aside his pen, and again to destroy great part of the manuscript. The portions which escaped destruction have been found since Mr. Hall's death. They want the advantage of entire continuity, as well as of the author's finishing touch; and,

being composed at distant periods, and in part evidently re-written, to suit the modification of the general purpose occasioned by the later attempts at restriction, they exhibit a slight repetition of sentiment. It has, however, been thought right to preserve the whole of them; as they unfold, and place in different lights, some valuable principles of general application.

For a full account of the proceedings on Lord Sidmouth's bill, the reader may advantageously consult "A Sketch of the History and Proceedings of the Deputies appointed to protect the Civil Rights of the Protestant Dissenters."

FRAGMENT ON VILLAGE PREACHING.

. . . . Where they beheld the papal power overturned, they were ready to imagine the season was approaching, so clearly foretold, when true religion should emerge from the clouds of superstition which environed her and enlightened the world. Who will say that these hopes indicated depravity in the minds of those who cherished them too fondly? It was surely not very criminal to rejoice at the prospect of the extinction of evil and the universal prevalence of justice, peace, and happiness; or to mistake "the times and seasons which the Father has put into his own power." Good men were, of all others, least likely to suspect that their hopes would be blasted by a wickedness of which the world afforded no example. But whatever of this delusion might have prevailed heretofore, the virtuous part of the public are completely recovered from it; nor has it had the smallest influence in stimulating the exertions which it is the purpose of this publication to defend.

The only shadow of argument on which Bishop Horsley founds his accusation, that village preaching has a political object, is, that it has been chiefly prevalent since the Pitt and Grenville bills, as they are styled, were passed; which put a stop to political meetings. Hence he infers that it is only a new channel into which the old stream is directed. Here, however, he is entirely mistaken. The true source of this increased activity is to be found in the missions, the first of which was established some years before the Grenville bills were passed. The attention of the religious public was strongly excited on

that occasion to the indispensable necessity of "preaching the gospel to every creature," and the result was a resolution to exert more zealous and extensive efforts to diffuse the knowledge of saving truth at home than had before been employed. Agreeable to this, it will be found, on inquiry, that those who most distinguished themselves in political debates have had the least share (if they have had any) in promoting these measures; and that the invariable effect of engaging in these plans has been to diminish the attention bestowed on political objects. This indeed could not fail to be the consequence; for as the mind is too limited to be very deeply impressed with more than one object at a time, a solicitude to promote the interests of piety, must insensibly diminish the ardour for every thing that is not necessarily involved in it; not to say that the spirit of devotion, which such designs imply and promote, is peculiarly incompatible with the violence and acrimony of political passions. He who is truly intent on promoting the eternal happiness of mankind, must look on futurity with so steady an eye, that he is in more danger of falling into indifference to the spectacle that is passing before him, than of suffering himself to be too much inflamed by it. He is under more temptation to desert his proper rank in society, to undervalue the importance of worldly activity, and to let opportunities of exertion slide through his hands, than to indulge turbulent and ambitious views.

Hence we find, in the first ages of the church, heathens made frequent complaints of the inactivity of christians, but never accused them of turbulence; and that while many fled into deserts, from austerity and devotion, not one, during the prevalence of paganism, endured the chastisement of the laws for sedition or treason. The pious of every age have been among the quiet of the land.

If our legislators are aware (as I hope they are) of the inconceivable benefits which are derived, in a political view, from the diffusion of pure and undefiled religion, no fascination of great talents or of high rank, no fear of misrepresentation or calumny, will tempt them to be

guilty of a legislative suicide, by exerting their authority to suppress it: since nothing can ever give equal efficacy to the laws or stability to the government. The law, of itself, can only address fears; religion speaks to the conscience, and commands it to respect that justice on which the law is founded. Human law can only arm itself with penalties which may be averted, despised, or endured; religion presents, in the displeasure of our Maker, an evil that can have no bounds. Human laws can only take cognizance of disorders in their last stage, proposing only the punishment of the delinquent, without attempting to prevent the crime; religion establishes a tribunal in our own breast, where that which is concealed from every other eye is arraigned, and the very embryo of crime detected and destroyed.

If we examine the sources of crimes, we shall perceive the chief temptation to violate the principle of justice and humanity, arises from a discontent with the allotments of Providence; men are apt to attach an importance to what they see another possesses. But what can be so sovereign a cure for this discontent as religion, which teaches that all things are under the disposal of infinite wisdom; that life is but a passage to an eternal condition of being; that every thing the world admires is passing away, and that he only who "doeth the will of God abideth for ever?"

Religion must infallibly promote obedience to the laws, by subduing those violent passions which give birth to crimes. As our hopes and fears must all turn on the present scene, or on futurity, it is plain that a principle which throws an infinite weight into the latter scale must greatly diminish the influence of the former. On this account, real piety must ever be an enemy to intemperate enjoyments, and to extravagant hopes. In addition to this, christianity enforces obedience to civil rulers with the utmost clearness and under the most solemn sanction, adopting the duties of a citizen into the family of religion, and commanding its disciples to revere civil government as the ordinance of God; and to be "subjeet, not chiefly for wrath, but for conscience sake." Who are so

likely to be loyal subjects as those who consider lawful princes, in the exercise of their functions, as the representatives of the Supreme Ruler, and judges as the dispensers of the portion confided to them of eternal justice? The public may be assured, that as nothing is more remote from the views of those who are most active in promoting village preaching than an intention to promote political discontent, so nothing is more removed from the practice of the preachers. That there may be an imprudent or an unprincipled individual who profanes the function of a preacher by introducing political remarks (a practice too common with those who are loudest in the condemnation of dissenters) is possible: though it has never been my lot to hear of any among our village preachers; but that such instances are extremely rare, and when they occur never fail to be discountenanced in the strongest manner, both by dissenters and methodists, may be affirmed with the utmost confidence. There is no maxim more constantly inculcated by all who have any influence in these measures. than that of scrupulously abstaining from every, even the remotest, allusion to politics. They have preached liberty indeed, but it is that liberty which Jesus Christ proclaimed at Nazareth, that holy and divine liberty with which the Son makes his followers free; not that liberty whose thrilling accents awake nations to arms, but that which is enjoyed in the highest perfection in the quiet of the sanctuary, where all is still; as in the temple of Solomon, the sound of the lifted hammer was not heard. They propose a revolution, but it is that by which men are translated from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God and his Christ. They propose great innovations, but such as consist in exhorting men to newness of heart.

His Lordship expresses his approbation of Sunday schools, provided they are placed under the inspection and control of the clergy. If the clergy will take the trouble of forming and inspecting Sunday schools, they may confer a great benefit on the public, and gain much honour to themselves: whether the nation will tamely submit to have the business of education exclusively in

the hands of any one set of men, remains to be tried. The attempt to support an ecclesiastical establishment, by invading the freedom of education, resembles more the policy of a Julian than the gentleness of Christ. To invade the freedom of charity is a stretch of tyranny still more odious. To control the movements of benevolence, and construe the impulse of compassion into a crime, is such an outrage as can only be paralleled in the darkest ages, and in the most barbarous minds. Of what crimes have the dissenters been convicted, we will boldly ask; of such infamy that even the exercise of benevolence in them must wear the aspect of guilt; and that they must be degraded, not only beneath the rights of citizens, but the possibilities of virtue? What have these helots of England done to deserve this more than Spartan cruelty? In the name of eternal justice, I invoke the injured majesty of our common nature to repel an attack so injurious, founded on aspersions so foul and detestable.

It is asserted that these revolutionary designs are carried on under pretences of superior piety. It is matter of accusation, that the dissenters make these pretences. If the dissenters, however, profess to have more piety than the members of the established church, it will be shrewdly suspected to arise from a very plain reason, namely, that they have more. Hypocrisy is the vice of individuals, not of numerous bodies of men, who can have no motive sufficiently extensive in its operation to engage them to submit to its restraints. The same conclusion results from another consideration. Nothing but a conscientious preference can, generally speaking, incline a man to a mode of religious profession which in the mildest times is unpopular, and at some seasons not exempt from danger and disgrace. Without contending for any superiority in the principles of dissent, the very circumstance of becoming a dissenter, or of continuing such, at some expense of worldly reputation and advantage, indicates a mind over which religious considerations have great influence. They who never scarcely think of religion at all, or who abandon themselves to the tide of opinion and fashion, are safely conducted into the haven

of the established church. To be content with merely being tolerated, instead of sharing the honours and emoluments of an opulent establishment, to have all the avenues which lead to greatness shut against them, is a sacrifice which nothing but conscientious piety, however mistaken, can prompt them to make. In addition to which, it may be remarked, that a religious minority, from a conviction that their conduct will be exposed to a severe scrutiny, and that nothing can sustain them against the contempt of the world but superior correctness of morals, have a motive for cherishing the spirit of their institution which others want.

On these accounts it will not, we hope, be deemed presumptuous if we take it for granted, that the dissenters, and especially that class of them who have signalized their zeal for the religious instruction of the poor, have really more piety than falls to the share of the great body of the people of England. But how is it now possible for pious men to enter into a conspiracy to overturn the constitution of their country, and to overwhelm every thing in anarchy? For this purpose they must unite themselves intimately with the infidel faction; they must make common cause with those detestable monsters whose pestilential breath has blasted, in other countries every thing cheering to the eye or refreshing to the heart. They must forget the infinite contrariety of principle which divides them; they must forget the daggers of these assassins, which, after destroying their enemies, they never fail to turn against their associates, impelled by an insatiable eagerness for destruction. They must put their fortune, their character, their life, in the hands of men with whom it would not be safe to trust themselves in a room. There is nothing more opposite than the spirit of piety and the spirit of faction. There enters into the composition of faction, a meddlesome and mischievous activity, blended with a callousness of heart; devotion softens the temper. Faction knows no delicacy in the choice of its society: it wants no other qualities in its associates than turbulence and discontent, a conscience which no crimes can startle, and an impudence

which no detection can confront: devotion, alarmed at wickedness, and disgusted with folly, is apt to carry the principle of selection too far. Faction delights in scenes of tumult and noise; devotion in solitude and retirement. Faction busies itself with forming external movements, and values itself only on the change it produces in the situation of external objects; the treasures and conquests of religion are internal. Faction draws its nourishment from an overweening conceit of superior wisdom, accompanied with a proportionable contempt of the understanding and virtue of other men. The solid foundation of piety is laid in humility, or a deep conviction of our sinfulness and fallibility. I will not say that men of real piety have never been betrayed into factious enterprises; or have not, on some occasions, pushed their opposition to government too far; but it may be safely affirmed, that whenever they have done so, it must have arisen from an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances; generally from the oppression which makes a wise man mad; that it is most foreign to their genuine character, and that nothing is a more effectual antidote to political turbulence than the prevalence of piety.

Before we proceed further, I must be permitted to lament that propensity to credit and propagate the most hideous calumnies, which seems to have arisen to an unprecedented height in this age. It may answer a temporary purpose, but it is well if it does not recoil on those who employ it. It resembles the policy of insurrections and riots, which, though they may occasionally punish or crush an obnoxious sect, no wise government will adopt, for fear of a reaction. To fill the minds of the public with hatred, jealousies, and suspicions, is to poison the fountains of public security. When this spirit is once awakened among a people, the character and conduct of its rulers seldom fail, in the long run, to be injured by it. Under disasters which the utmost wisdom cannot prevent, under burdens which the strictest economy may impose, government presents a plain, a palpable, and permanent pretext of discontent and suspicion. Misery finds a sort of relief in attribu-

ting its sufferings to the conduct of others, and while it soothes its anguish by resentment and clamour, it fastens on the object that first presents itself. This object will naturally be the rulers of the nation. Nor is there any thing with respect to which men are more liable to be mistaken, than the share which the imprudence or misconduct of civil government has in the production of public calamities. So various, so subtle, so complicated in their operation are the causes which conduct to prosperity or decline in the affairs of nations, that it is a matter of the utmost delicacy to determine what share is to be assigned to human agency, and what to contingencies and events. This obscurity furnishes infinite scope for the exercise of candour in the well disposed, and for the indulgence of suspicion and discontent in the factious. In scenes so complicated, and when the steps are so numerous and so untraceable between the first movement and the last, it is equally difficult to form a right estimate of events, when we are very remote, or when we are very near them. If we attempt to survey a remote æra, we are lost in naked generalities; when we turn our eyes on the scene before us, our attention is apt to be limited to detached parts; we are apt to confound proximate with remote causes, to mistake casual coincidence for natural connexion, and to give a disproportionate importance to whatever we immediately feel. Let them who have any doubt of the dreadful effects of calumny, look at what took place in France, where they will find it was the principal engine employed by the Brissotines to overturn the monarchy, and afterwards by Robespierre to deluge that devoted country with blood. By inspiring everlasting jealousies and unbounded fears, he contrived to extirpate every remain of tenderness and pity, and to preserve the minds of the people in constant agitation, like the sea in a storm. It was this that whetted the daggers of assassins. It was the withering blast of this spirit that destroyed every thing amiable and noble in that unhappy kingdom, resigned to the desolating sway of selfishness and revenge. Nothing can be more fatal to

public repose; nothing can tend more immediately to quicken the seeds of convulsion. That this malignant leaven should be infused into the public mind by any hands, must be matter of deep regret; that it should be mingled and prepared by those hands from which the world is wont to look for benedictions and blessings, seems awful and portentous.

Let not this, however, be understood to intimate that there is any room to apprehend the dissenters may be provoked to verify the suspicions and calumnies to which they are incessantly exposed. The writer would be understood to speak merely of the tendency of such infusions on the nation at large; not at all of their influence on the dissenters or methodists. Their loyalty is of too fine a texture to be affected by the efflux or influx of public opinion. While they enjoyed the countenance of the public, their loyalty was sustained by a higher motive than popularity, nor will any discouragement tempt them to forfeit it. In the mean time they place a firm reliance, first on the protection of Heaven, the judge of their innocence, next on the impartial justice and parental kindness of their gracious sovereign, to prevent them from being overwhelmed and swallowed up by the reproaches of their enemies.

Enough has been said on this head, I trust, to satisfy every unprejudiced person, that nothing is more remote from the design of these institutions than the promotion of seditious or revolutionary plans.

It is time to proceed to a distinct charge, which is that of hostility to the church of England. It is confidently asserted by the prelate, to whom we have so often had occasion to allude, that it is the constant practice of itinerant preachers to calumniate the clergy, by representing them as a set of hirelings, destitute of the spirit of piety, and utterly indifferent to the welfare of their flocks; by which artifices they alienate the affections of the people from the established pastors, and prepare them for becoming dissenters; or what, in the dialect of the learned prelate, is the same thing, schismatics.

Although it is extremely disagreeable to be obliged to

contradict a positive assertion in a manner equally positive, yet truth compels us on this occasion to declare, that the statement here made is without any sort of foundation in truth. The practice of vilifying the established clergy is so far from being commonly adopted in the discourses, either of dissenters or methodists, that it may be safely affirmed, if there are any instances of conduct so highly improper, they are extremely rare, and that where the dissenters offend in this particular once, the established clergy are guilty of it ten times. It is a practice which the late Mr. Wesley discouraged, in his connexion, to the utmost; nor are the dissenters, as a body, less scrupulous and delicate on that head. Still, however, it will be said, a principle of hostility to the established church seems inseparable from these exertions; the tendency of preaching in the parishes of authorized ministers must be to alienate the people from the established mode of worship, and, in the issue, to endanger the existence of the national church.

As this objection wears a more plausible appearance than any other, and has been urged in a great variety of forms, the author must beg the patience of the reader, while he gives it a full and distinct examination.

1. The objection we are considering seems to imply, on the part of those who urge it, an inattention to the true genius and design of a religious establishment. We must distinguish between the design of religion itself, and the design of that support which is given to it by human laws. The design of religion itself is to discipline the mind and prepare the heart for the happiness of heaven. The design of supporting a particular form of religion by law, is much less extensive; it is to derive from it that security which it never fails to confer on the interests of civil society. This may be termed the indirect benefit of religion; with a view to which the policy of legislation has thought it right to incorporate it with human laws. The establishment of a religion is not to be considered as a final end. In respect to importance it is never to be confounded with religion, or even to be

placed on a level with the peace and good order of society, to which it ought ever to be in perfect subordination. It aims at nothing farther than to secure such a prevalence of religion as shall make men conscientious and upright. By whatever means this is accomplished, the true design of every religious establishment is answered. From the indisposition of mankind to direct their thoughts to a futurity; from their proneness to immerse themselves in present and sensible objects; and the ignorance which follows of course, it has been thought necessary to set apart a particular order of men to inculcate its truths, and to exemplify its duties. Laws will not be obeyed, harmony in society cannot be maintained, without virtue; virtue cannot subsist without religion. The sentiments of religion, it is thought, will be effaced from the mind by the influence of worldly passions and pursuits, unless it is recognized by the sovereign, and public teachers appointed by the state.

Whoever attends to this, must perceive that the establishment was intended, not to correct an excess, but to supply a defect; not to prevent men from becoming too devout, but to preserve them from falling into irreligion and vice. It was not because men are too much disposed to be religious, but because they are too apt to forget it, that our forefathers thought proper to give it a legal establishment. On a similar principle, universities were established, and colleges endowed, to stimulate literary ardour, and facilitate the means of acquiring knowledge; and not that it might be made a crime to receive instruction in any other place. If peculiar privileges and honours were conferred on these seminaries, it was not with a view to limit, confine, and discourage, but to animate the exertions of literary talent. If they seemed to narrow the stream, it was only with a view to deepen the current.

To attempt to restrain the prevalence of religion, to suppress the efforts of good men for the promotion of piety, under pretence of guarding the established church, is to lose sight of the design of all religion, and to

counteract the purpose for which the establishment of it in particular was made. It would be to found the security of the church on the ruins of religion.

2. They who urge the objection seem not to have reflected sufficiently on the prodigious advantages which the church of England possesses for securing its existence and prosperity. The large portion of property it holds gives it a great national weight and importance. The regular gradations of authority and rank cement its several parts closely together, and prepare it on all occasions to act with the utmost promptitude and unanimity. Its ministers, vested with legal authority and character, are the natural objects of a veneration, of which nothing but personal misbehaviour can deprive them.

Mankind are apt to be strongly prejudiced in favour of whatever is countenanced by antiquity, enforced by authority, and recommended by custom. The pleasure of acquiescing in the decision of others is by most men so much preferred to the toil and hazard of inquiry, and so few are either able or disposed to examine for themselves, that the voice of law will generally be taken for the dictates of justice.

Nor is it the weakness only of mankind that inclines them to look with a favourable eye on what is established; some of the most amiable propensities of the heart lean the same way,—deference to superior wisdom and to great names; the love of quiet, and the dread of confusion and disorder. These considerations will prevail over minds which are too virtuous to be moved by a gross self-interest. Further, the religion of the state will ever be the religion of the vain and aspiring. A degree of ridicule never fails to be attached to a religious minority. In all the efforts of churchmen, their movements are facilitated by the current of public opinion, while dissenters are on every occasion obstructed by public prejudice. Thus churchmen set out with a partiality on their side, which nothing but neglect and misconduct can destroy; dissenters, with a weight of suspicion and dislike, which nothing but discreet and exemplary behaviour can remove.

If we contemplate, in connexion with the subject we are upon, the manners and institutions of the British nation, we shall perceive that the established church in these kingdoms possesses such pledges of its safety, as are not to be found in any protestant community besides. A finished English education is, in all its stages, clerical; the public seminaries of instruction, together with the two universities, being almost entirely under the conduct of ecclesiastics; by which means a reverence for the church is imbibed with the first elements of knowledge. Its splendid literary establishments, its magnificent libraries, the accumulation of ages, and, above all, the great and illustrious names it has produced in every department of genius and of learning, the glory of the world; who have conferred dignity, not so much on their profession as on their species; gives it, in a literary view, a decided superiority, and in popular opinion an exclusive esteem. The policy of modern times has, in addition to this, confided to its ministers more and more of the administration of the laws, in which they are become the immediate organs of justice to the people; and the claims of spiritual authority are hence enforced by the habits of civil submission.

Freed from the fetters of celibacy, which, if they augment its zeal, must narrow its influence in popish countries, it strikes its roots deep into the social soil, and forms numerous alliances, so that there is scarcely a considerable family in the nation which is not immediately interested in its support. A popish clergy, secluded from the enjoyments of domestic life, may be expected, indeed, to have a more eager ambition for the advancement of their order, in consequence of their passions being all directed to one point; but as their manners must be less amiable, so, from this insulated condition, they are liable to fall without a struggle and without pity. They are a loose appendage of the state, not a part of its growth and substance. With respect to the English clergy it is quite otherwise. As they are continually receiving supplies from the mass of the community, so they are continually restoring to it, in the persons

of their sons and daughters, what it has lost. By these means a continual communication is maintained with the body of the people, manners are assimilated, and the ties of tenderness and attachment extended. The gradations of rank, also, which are established in it, contribute to the same purpose, and exhibit an image of the political constitution planted in every corner of the kingdom, and mingled with every order of the state; while its inferior members propagate its influence among the commonalty, it allies itself on the side of its dignitaries with all that is august, basks in the smile of monarchs, and shares in the splendour of courts.

A society which has such numerous pledges for its security, which so many motives concur to favour, so many passions to support, must be guilty of some extraordinary misconduct before it can forfeit the attachment of the people. It is evident it can only fall under the weight of its own abuses.

3. It is possible, indeed, to conceive a degree of secularity and dissipation which may first greatly impair its influence, and finally endanger its existence. In an age not remarkable for credulity or superstition, as the conduct of ecclesiastics will have more weight than their pretensions, nothing can long secure them from popular contempt, but exemplary morals and diligence.

To invest idleness and dissipation with the privileges of laborious piety, is an impracticable attempt. For by a constitution more ancient than that of any priesthood, superior degrees of sanctity and of exertion will gain superior esteem as their natural reward. We must not wonder to find the public forget the reverence due to the sacred profession, when its members forget the spirit, and neglect the duties, on which that reverence was founded. The natural equity of mankind will not suffer the monopoly of contradictory goods. If the people are expected to reverence an order, it must be from the consciousness of benefits received. If the clergy claim authority, it must be accompanied with a solicitude for the spiritual interest of their flocks, and [that pastoral] labour [be well] sustained. To enjoy,

at once, both honour and ease, never fell to the share of any profession. If the clergy neglect their charge, if they conform to the spirit of the world, and engage with eagerness in the pursuits of ambition, or of pleasure, it will be impossible for any human policy to preserve them from sinking in the public esteem.

4. As far as the attachment of the people to their established ministers is diminished in consequence of misconduct on their part, it will not be remedied by excluding other instructors. To deprive them of every other means of information may make them heathens, but will not make them churchmen. The established ministers are either equal to others in zeal and diligence, or inferior. If they are equally laborious and exemplary, what have they to fear, while they have every advantage in their possession which superior learning, a legal character, and the countenance of their superiors can confer? To assert that the same degree of diligence and piety in a clergyman will not produce an equal effect as when they are exerted by a dissenter, is to yield the cause of the establishment at once; for it is to affirm that there is a source of weakness in the very nature of an establishment, which prevents equal means in other respects from being equally influential; an extraordinary assertion, which the friends of the established church would be, we should suppose, the last to make. The policy of an establishment is founded on a supposition, that it is the most effectual mode of inculcating some degree of religion, and of impressing sentiments of piety on the minds of men. But if, on the contrary, it be found that exertions merely equal made in any other form produce more powerful effects, that supposition is invalidated, and the structure raised upon it falls to the ground. To give religion a legal subsistence, it seems, by this reasoning, is so far from arming it with superior energy, that it is, of all the modes under which it can appear, the most disadvantageous, and ignorance and fanaticism gain an easy triumph over it.

If the other supposition be taken, that the established

ministers are inferior to others in diligence and exertion, and that on this account their popularity is endangered; to give them the monopoly of religious instruction is to violate every principle of reason and equity. It is punishing the innocent for the faults of the guilty. It is to reward a breach of trust with an enlargement of power. Instead of quickening indolence, or correcting abuse, it is conferring impunity on both. The natural remedy for whatever inconveniences are experienced or apprehended from established abuses, is the institution of discipline and the exercise of wholesome correction by the rulers of the church, who are invested with adequate power for that purpose. To look out and ask for an external force to repel the consequences of an inward disease; to demand the interposition of the legislature to protect them from the effects of their own abuses, while they refuse the proper remedy, is repugnant to every maxim of justice. They ought at least to wait until the abuses they complain of are remedied; until the internal resources of reformation are employed. With little propriety or grace can they complain of impertinent intruders, who are inattentive to the duties of their allotted station. In the report of the Lincolnshire clergy,* it is frankly acknowledged that much of the decline of religion is to be imputed to the neglect of the clergy; and yet, almost in the same breath, they express a desire that the legislature would give them power to expel intruders from their parishes. It has usually been expected that superior claims should be founded, at least, on the pretence of superior merits. But here the order of things is reversed. At the very moment they are asking for an increase of power, they confess themselves unworthy of it, by having abused, or neglected to employ, the power already intrusted into their hands. Not content to escape without punishment, they ask to be rewarded for a breach of ecclesiastical trust, and the want of clerical virtues. Whatever we may think of

* Circulated in 1801 or 1802.—Ed.

their delicacy, we cannot but commend their prudence, in not putting their names to such a paper.

5. It deserves to be considered what effect the prohibition of other instruction is likely to have on the conduct of the clergy themselves. Is it likely to diminish or increase the frequency of non-residence, or the extent of secular and dissipated habits? Will it tend to augment their professional diligence and zeal, the surest support of an ecclesiastical order? Will the monopoly of religious instruction fail to produce the effect of all other monopolies? While men are accustomed to compare rival pretensions; while emulation continues to be classed among human passions, these questions will admit but of one answer. A generous competition is the animating spirit of every profession, without which it droops and languishes. If we look around us, we shall perceive that all the discoveries which have enriched science, and the improvements which have embellished life, are to be ascribed to the competition of nations with nations, of cities with cities, and of men with men. From causes too obvious to need explanation, there is less of this spirit in the clerical profession than in any other; which is the principal reason of the talent of preaching having been so little cultivated.

It is easy to see, then, what will be the consequence of extinguishing the small remains of emulation or jealousy, call it by what name you please, which springs from the complete toleration of a diversity of sects. If the dread of intrusion (as it is called) into their parishes is not sufficient to prevent some from neglecting their pastoral duties, this neglect will be much more profound when there is nothing to disturb their repose. When the minister fears no rival, and the people despair of any remedy, the inattention of the one and the ignorance of the other will increase in equal proportion.

The Impolicy of Intolerance.

There is another objection frequently urged against village preaching, which will deserve our attention. It is alleged that the gross fanaticism which distinguishes the self-appointed teachers of religion tends to bring christianity into contempt, and threatens the most serious mischief to the cause of enlightened piety. That fanaticism is an evil, and that a considerable portion of it may frequently be blended with those efforts to revive religion for which we are pleading, will not be denied. A little reflection, however, may convince us that the danger from this quarter is not so alarming as might be apprehended at first sight.

Fanaticism, as far as we are at present concerned with it, may be defined such an overwhelming impression of the ideas relating to the future world as disqualifies for the duties of life.

1. From the very nature of fanaticism it is an evil of short duration. As it implies an irregular movement, or an inflamed state of the passions, when these return to their natural state it subsides. Nothing that is violent will last long. The vicissitudes of the world, and the business of life, are admirably adapted to abate the excesses of religious enthusiasm. In a state where there are such incessant calls to activity, where want presses, desire allures, and ambition inflames, there is little room to dread an excessive attention to the objects of an invisible futurity.

A few rare examples of this kind might perhaps be found, by diligent inquiry, over which infidelity would triumph and piety drop a tear. It is not uncommon, however, to find those who, at the commencement of their religious course, have betrayed symptoms of enthusiasm, become in the issue the most amiable characters. With the increase of knowledge, the intemperate ardour of their zeal has subsided into a steady faith and fervent charity, so as to exemplify the promise of scripture, that the "path of the just" shall be "as the shining light,

which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." As the energy of the religious principle is exerted in overcoming the world; so that variety of action and enlarged experience which the business of life supplies, serves to correct its excesses and restrain its aberrations.

There are some who, proscribing the exercise of the affections entirely in religion, would reduce christianity to a mere rule of life; but as such persons betray an extreme ignorance of human nature, as well as of the Scriptures, I shall content myself with remarking, that the apostles, had they lived in the days of these men, would have been as little exempt from their ridicule as any other itinerants. If the supreme love of God, a solicitude to advance his honour, ardent desires after happiness, together with a comparative deadness to the present state, be enthusiasm, it is that enthusiasm which animated the Saviour, and breathes throughout the Scriptures.

2. In admitting that a portion of enthusiasm may possibly be blended with the efforts to revive serious religion alluded to, we are far from meaning to insinuate that that is their distinguishing character; or that those who exert themselves in that way can, as a body, be justly classed with fanatics. The far greater part are men of good natural sense united to fervent piety. If not possessed of the advantages of a learned education, they are by no means ignorant. They have living knowledge. Familiarly conversant with the Bible, they are men of devotional habits, and of exemplary conduct. The insulting epithets applied to such men might naturally provoke retaliation, and lead to an inquiry how far the learning, so ostentatiously displayed, is connected with religious knowledge; when it would perhaps be found that some of their revilers are better able to solve a geometrical problem than a theological difficulty, and are better acquainted with the epistles of Horace than those of St. Paul. But, as it is my wish strenuously to avoid whatever might awaken angry passions, I forbear to press these inquiries.

Enthusiasm is an evil much less to be dreaded than

superstition. The latter is a disease of opinion, which may be transmitted with fresh accumulation of error from age to age. It is the spirit of slumber in which whole nations are immersed. Placing religion, which is most foreign to its nature, in depending for acceptance with God on absurd penances or unmeaning ceremonies, it resigns the understanding to ignorance and the heart to insensibility. No generous sentiments, no active virtues, ever issue from superstition.

Superstition is the disease of nations, enthusiasm that of individuals; the former grows more inveterate by time, the latter is cured by it.

We hope the remembrance of popish cruelties is not so far effaced from the minds of our countrymen as to permit them to see the forge of the giant without terror.

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On Toleration.

We have arrived at the last part of our subject, which relates to the expediency and justice of legal interference in the suppression of these attempts. And here I feel a solicitude lest I should give a wrong touch to the ark of religious liberty, and injure the cause which I wish to promote.

1. Toleration of a diversity of worship has now been legally established and uninterruptedly practised for more than a century; during which we have enjoyed a degree of internal peace and prosperity unexampled in any former age. This, which was the thing most wanted to perfect the constitution, has softened and harmonized the spirits of men, has mitigated the fierceness of religious factions, and has made them of one heart and mind in the love of their country and attachment to its sovereign. The national wealth has been augmented, commerce extended, arts invented or improved, and society embellished with an additional portion of elegance and humanity. The resources of public strength have been enlarged, and the nation has become more formidable in

war and more respected in peace. The struggles of party produce no other effects than clamorous invective and intrigue; and public rumour, instead of being occupied with the horrors of civil commotion, announces the intelligence of the fall of the ministry, or some new arrangement in the cabinet. This toleration has materially advanced the interest of the established church itself, by abating the acrimony of its adversaries, and affording room for the display of talent in other communities, the surest prevention of indolence in its own.

The principles of toleration also harmonize with that refinement of thinking and spirit of research which has distinguished the last century; in consequence of which this important advantage has been reaped, that the opinions of the speculative, which always have ultimately great effect, coincide with the practice of the constitution. Hence it is that England may be considered as the native soil of bold original minds; nor is there any danger of our being reasoned into a dislike of the constitution.

And shall we endanger the loss of all these advantages by adopting a new course of policy? What security will they afford us, who invites to tread in new and perilous paths? What security will they afford us, that the same tranquillity and the same prosperity will accompany us in so great a change; when the very essence of the constitution shall have been altered, and the very words which Englishmen were proud to pronounce expunged from the vocabulary?

A dread of innovation has hitherto prevented the correction of some flagrant abuses; yet it is rather extraordinary that some of those who profess to have most of that dread are among the most clamorous for an innovation in the toleration act.

But is not this a most serious innovation? Must we then understand these men to mean that they are only enemies to such innovations as are on the side of liberty, and that they are prepared to trample on the most fundamental laws, to promote persecution and tyranny? With such men it is to little purpose to expostulate; we leave them to the enjoyment of that calm sunshine

which must fill the hearts of men of so must purity and benevolence.

To others it may be proper to suggest, that if innovations are dangerous, they are not equally so, and that there is a great difference betwixt innovations which favour the spirit of a constitution, and those that contradict it. The former may be compared to the natural growth of the human body, the latter to the violent dismemberment of its parts. The former completes an imperfect analogy; the latter destroys just proportions. The former is the removal of an obstruction which prevents the equable motion of the machine; the latter occasions the collision of interfering principles. When oppressive laws are engrafted on a free constitution, the contrast of liberty and tyranny will make the oppression to be doubly felt. In such a situation, the free and undaunted spirit which the constitution has cherished suffers violence. The precedents of past times, the examples of their ancestors, the fundamental principles of the constitution, have taught them to consider themselves as free. By the proposed laws they are instructed to look upon themselves in a new light. They are commanded to unlearn all that they have learned, to descend from the dignity of freemen to the abject condition of a slave. Slavery may exist where freedom is unknown, without endangering the public tranquillity: in some countries perhaps without destruction of public happiness. But the slightest invasion of the liberties of a free country awakens a jealousy and resentment which are not easily appeased. Let those then who are alarmed at the danger of innovation, seriously reflect on the possible consequences of an innovation so momentous. A free and a despotic state may both be compatible with liberty; but who ever would voluntarily make the transition from one to the other?

2. The liberty of worshipping God in that manner which the conscience of every individual dictates, provided nothing be introduced into worship incompatible with good morals, may be justly claimed as an inalienable right. The relation which subsists betwixt man and

his Maker, and the consequent obligation to worship him, is prior to the civil relation between magistrates and subjects. It is a more important relation, since all the good a creature can enjoy is derived from it, and all his reasonable hopes of happiness on the goodness of the Almighty. It differs, too, from every other, in that it is invisible, perpetual, and eternal. A man may or may not be the member of a civil community, but he is always the creature of God. For these reasons, political duties, or those which result from the relation of the subject to the prince, must, in their nature, be subordinate to religious. When the commands of a civil superior interfere with those which we conscientiously believe to be the laws of God, submission to the former must be criminal; for the two obligations are not equipollent, but the former is essential, invariable, and paramount to every other: "Whether it be right," said the apostles, "to obey God or man, judge ye." But if an active obedience in such circumstances be *criminal*, to prescribe it cannot be *innocent*, since it would be absurd to affirm that exercise of authority to be right to which it is wrong to submit. Rights and duties are correlatives. A right to command necessarily implies the enforcing that which is right with respect to those to whom the duty of submission belongs. Nor is it to any purpose to allege that the worship prescribed is rational and scriptural, and far more excellent than that which is prohibited. For if we remember that worship is no other than the outward expression of the love and fear of God, we must perceive, that to become acceptable, it is above all things necessary that it be such as approves itself to the mind of the worshipper; such as he sincerely believes will be pleasing to God. It is impossible to please God without a sincere intention to please him. We may hope, from him who knows our frame, for a merciful indulgence to the imperfections which spring from involuntary ignorance or latent prejudice. It agrees with his benignity to suppose he will graciously accept that worship which is not the best in itself, providing it be the best we know how to present. But to

worship with those rites and ceremonies which our conscience does not approve, however excellent in themselves, is an insult to the Deity. A Jew, for example, who joined in the worship of a christian church, while he retained the incredulity which distinguishes his nation, would be guilty of the highest impiety; nor would it be any extenuation of his fault to allege that the worship in which he assisted was founded on scripture, and commanded by God, while his conviction was contrary. He who is utterly careless of the favour of God, and without any solicitude respecting a future world, will naturally follow the stream of authority or fashion, and adopt any mode of religion which happens to have the ascendency. But the sincere worshipper of God will find it impossible to comply with any religious injunctions which appear to him to interfere with the will of God.

Besides, as is urged with great force by Mr. Locke, if the magistrate of one country has a right to impose his religion under pains and penalties, the magistrates of all other countries must have an equal right. Religious truth will vary with the boundaries of nations; and with equal justice the Pope will be revered in Spain, Mahomet in Turkey, and Brahma in India. It is easy to see to what those principles tend, which imply that there is nothing determinate, nothing sacred in religion, and that all modes of worship are equally pleasing to God, and equally useful. The principles of persecution, pushed to their just consequence, terminate in Hobbism.*

It is worth while to consider what is likely to be the effect of enacting coercive laws in religion. If the men at whom they are aimed are conscientious they will still persevere. They will reply to the injunction of silence, what the apostles did to the chief priest, "whether it be right to obey God or man, judge ye." They will still persist in their attempts to evangelize the poor. This

* It is curious that Mr. Hall and his distinguished friend Sir James Macintosh, should, unknown to each other, at different times and by a different course, arrive at a coincident result not likely to occur to ordinary minds. Sir James, in his valuable "Preliminary Dissertation," ENCY. BRITAN. p. 319, says, "A Hobbist is the only consistent persecutor."—ED.

will necessitate the exercise of greater severities, the failure of which will be considered as a demand for punishments still heavier, until the magistrate has proceeded to banishment, confiscation, and death. For it is the inconvenience attending persecution, that it is necessarily progressive. Small punishments only irritate. It commences with an intention of suppressing error; baffled in its first attempt, and stung with disappointment, it soon loses sight of its original design; it soon degenerates into a settled resolution to subdue contumacy, and strike terror. It becomes a fearful struggle betwixt power and fortitude; the power of inflicting suffering, and that of enduring, which shall wear the other out. Let those, then, who are advocates for coercive measures, not content themselves with contemplating those mild expedients which may first present themselves to their minds, but prepare for the consequences, and lay their account with being impelled to the exercise of the last severities. Let them expect to see dungeons crammed with prisoners, and scaffolds streaming with blood. Will any thing but the most unremitting vigilance, the most unrelenting system of espionage, prevent every class of dissenters and methodists from fleeing from such a country, and seeking an asylum in a foreign land?

It is not easy to conceive the wound which this will inflict on the population and prosperity of the empire. That the dissenters are, as a body, an industrious and sober people, their enemies will not deny; and that the commercial prosperity of a country is closely involved in the preservation of such a class of people is equally undeniable. The loss sustained by France in the exile of a million of protestants, by the repeal of the edict of Nantes, has never yet been repaired. Nor was there ever a period when the hazarding such a loss would be more impolitic than the present; when the flourishing state of trade and commerce is essential to the stability of the government, and in a manner to the national existence. For the diminution of revenue, and the disorganization which a considerable failure in the produce of the taxes would occasion, we shall meet with a miserable

compensation in a forced and hypocritical uniformity in worship.

> "Non tali auxilio nec defensoribus istis
> Tempus eget."———
>
> *Virgil.*

Will they, whose pride and violence have produced this, be able to remedy the mischief? Will lofty pretensions to unity, will tragic declamations on the sin of schism, and abandoning dissenters to the uncovenanted mercies of God?

The consequences of such an event deserve also to be considered in another point of view. It surely requires but little candour to acknowledge that the deprivations and discredit to which dissenters are exposed, make it probable that, however in the judgement of their opponents they are erroneous, they are at least conscientious. Whatever may be imagined of the caprice, the levity, or obstinacy of individuals, nothing but a sense of duty, it may be fairly presumed, could prevail on numerous bodies of men to place themselves in that situation. In every country, it is no impeachment of the national establishment to suppose that many of those who continue out of its pale, and decline its emoluments, are men of serious piety. If we may form any conjecture of the dissenters of the present day from those of former times, it is obvious that my last remark will apply to them with peculiar force. As the loss of virtue is the greatest loss a nation can sustain, so the expulsion of those who have been distinguished by possessing a superior degree of piety is an ill omen, an alarming advance towards a general corruption of morals. Men of true piety, in whatever communities they are found, "are the salt of the earth." Their example corroborates the sentiments of virtue, and preserves from degradation the standard of morals. Vice, naturally mean and cowardly, is abashed and confounded before the majesty of virtue. The efficacy of good examples in the formation of public opinion is incalculable. Though men justify their conduct by reasons, and sometimes bring the very rules of virtue to the touchstone of abstraction, yet they princi-

pally act from example. Metaphysical reasons have, in reality, had as little to do in the formation of morals, as rules of grammar in the original structure of language, or those of criticism in the formation of orators and poets.

But if the influence of example is so extensive, and if it be admitted that the dissenters, as a body, are exemplary for industry, sobriety, and a serious sense of religion, the sacrifice of so large a portion of national virtue must be confessed to be an evil of the first magnitude; to say nothing of the justice of the divine administration, which is wont to make the departure of the pious from among a people the signal for pouring out its vials upon guilty cities and nations. Though such an event is alarming at all times, yet the peculiar complexion of the present renders it more so than ever. To every impartial observer it must be obvious that the present times are distinguished by an unexampled relaxation of manners; or such levity and indifference to every thing serious, as threatens an open revolt from christianity. That rapacity and luxury, a love of pleasure, together with an open disdain for the duties of religion, have rapidly advanced within the last twenty years, can as little be denied.

And is this a season in which we can safely sacrifice a large portion of public virtue and piety? I am aware that the dissenters are considered as a precise and narrow-minded people, whose minds have not expanded with the growing improvements of the age, and that not a little ridicule has attached to them on that account: but may not this unyielding austerity, and these recluse manners, be a useful corrective to the dissipation of the age? While the polished manners of one class of society contribute to its embellishment, may not the severer virtues of another be equally beneficial in affording it stability and strength? Refinement may point the spire, but they are the plain principles of virtue which alone form the basis of the social fabric.

It will not be thought a digression from the present subject to remark the consequences which followed in

France from the repeal of the edict of Nantes; to which the measures in question bear a strong resemblance. By that event France deprived herself of a million of her most industrious subjects, who carried their industry, their arts, and their riches into other countries. The loss which her trade and manufactures sustained by this event was, no doubt, prodigious. But it is not in that view my subject leads me to consider the ill consequences of that step. She lost a people whose simple, frugal manners, and whose conscientious piety, were well adapted to stem the growing corruption of the times, while the zeal and piety of their pastors were a continual stimulus to awaken the exertions of the national clergy.

If France had never had her Saurins, her Claudes, her De Plessis Mornays, her national church had never boasted the genius of Bossuet and the virtues of Fenelon. From the fatal moment she put a period to the toleration of the protestants, the corruptions of the clergy, the abuses of the church, the impiety of the people, met with no check, till infidelity of the worst sort pervaded and ruined the nation. When the remote as well as immediate effects of that edict which suppressed the protestants are taken into the account; when we consider the careless security and growing corruption which hung over the gallican church in consequence of it, it will not be thought too much to affirm that, to that measure may be traced the destruction of the monarchy and the ruin of the nation.

He who considers what it is that constitutes the force of penal laws, will find it is their agreement with the moral feelings which nature has planted in the breast. When the actions they punish are such, and only such, as the tribunal of conscience has already condemned, they are the constant object of respect and reverence. They enforce and corroborate the principles of moral order, by publishing its decisions and executing its sanctions. They present to the view of mankind an august image of a moral administration,—a representation in miniature of the eternal justice which presides in the dispensations of the Almighty. We behold nothing of

the passions of men; we forget their agency, and seem to see nothing but justice and order appearing for a moment on the earth, to restore the tranquillity, and correct the disorders, of society. The sentiments of morality and the sanctions of law maintain, in such a situation, a reciprocal influence over each other. The former derive additional authority from public opinion, and the latter appear sacred and venerable in consequence of their coincidence with the dictates of conscience. When criminal law thus concurs with the maxims of private morality, by corroborating the dictates of conscience, and inspiring the love of justice, tranquillity, and order, and the advancement of the public good, every innocent person becomes interested in maintaining their authority and promoting their execution. Every sentiment of the mind, the sense of security, the love of the public, the sentiment of justice, the abhorrence of crime, are leagued on the side of the laws, and are so many securities for their due execution. It has been found by experience, as the result of these principles, that laws become feeble and relaxed, not only when they punish innocent objects, but when the punishments they assign are disproportionate to the offence. The want of harmony betwixt the decision of the public and the private tribunal interposes an invariable obstruction to their observance; for crimes must be detected and punishments inflicted by men who will not lend their aid to enforce what they secretly condemn. Hence laws which are enacted with precipitance and passion, or under the influence of party motives, when they come to be executed will have to encounter a perpetual friction, arising from their repugnance to the manners and sentiments of the public. By these means public opinion, which is nothing but the aggregate of the sentiments of individuals, often limits, happily for mankind, the assumed omnipotence of legislation. They are framed in one element, they are executed in another; they must live in a different atmosphere from that in which they are born.

But admitting that the efforts of zeal and the vigilance of government supply this defect, and secure the punish-

ment of those who transgress these laws, it deserves to be considered in what manner their punishment will impress the public. With what feelings will they contemplate the ruin or imprisonment of virtuous men for the exercise of what they esteem the rights of conscience? Will the condign punishment of their countrymen, not for disturbing the public peace, or for the violation of property, but for a well-meant endeavour to diffuse the principles of piety and the blessings of religion, augment their reverence for the laws; or rather will it not produce, in some an indignation against such flagrant injustice, in others confuse the distinction of right and wrong? When they see atrocious crimes and eminent virtues pursued and punished with the same severity, it must tend to destroy all respect for legislation. They will be no longer solicitous to manifest their innocence, but to secure their impunity; and to the honour of obeying will succeed that of evading the laws. Nor is this all. In the detection of these artificial crimes, the assistance of the profligate and abandoned alone can be expected; which will complete the triumph of wickedness over piety and innocence. To the alliance betwixt church and state we are already familiarized; but an alliance, under pretence of securing the church, betwixt the ministers of religion and a detestable spawn of spies and informers, will appear surprising; nor is it difficult to foresee what ideas it will impress of that religion which stands in need of such aid, or of those ministers who stoop to employ it. Until, by some strange revolution, all the traces of genuine christianity, and all the history of its propagation, are effaced from the mind, it will be impossible for men to mistake this for the religion of Jesus; a religion which grew up in the midst of sufferings, and whose only weapon is love. In such proceedings they will look for the marks and signs of the true church, and instead of the successors of the apostles, they will imagine they behold a Jewish sanhedrim solemnly commanding the illiterate disciples of Jesus to "teach no more in that name."

It is more than probable that a similar reply will be

made, to that of the apostles on a similar occasion, "Whether it be right to obey God or man, judge ye." Under a full conviction that they are in the path of duty, and promoting the eternal happiness of mankind, it is not easy to see how they can desist. Whatever political superiors may imagine, he who conceives himself implicated in the command to "preach the gospel to every creature," will find it morally impossible to yield active obedience to any contrary command. "We cannot," saith the apostle, "but speak the things which we have heard and seen."

To nominal christians, who may rather be said to comply with the religion of their country than to believe it, on such a subject it is in vain to appeal; but they who are impressed with the importance of eternal things, and know "the gospel to be the power of God unto salvation," will feel no hesitation how to determine in this case.

In perfect consistency with a cheerful submission to the civil authority of their superiors, they will consider it a duty resulting from their allegiance to Jesus Christ to persist in their endeavours to convert mankind.

That coercive measures will tend to ferment a spirit of division in the kingdom, can admit of little doubt. Many, it may be reasonably expected, will feel a generous concern for the oppressed, though they may ridicule the cause in which they suffer; while men of enlarged minds, and who are thoroughly imbued with the love of liberty, will perceive in any one act of oppression, however insulated, a precedent most dangerous to freedom. The mischief in itself may appear little, and the merit of the sufferers inconsiderable in their eyes; but they will consider it as an experiment on the public mind, calculated to prepare them for other acts of oppression; they will consider every thing as alarming that impairs the integrity of freedom, from a conviction that a vessel may be sunk by the smallest leak.

Thus two formidable parties will probably be produced in the kingdom, inflamed with mutual animosity and suspicion. Of the parliament which assembled in the

year 1640, on the eve of those commotions which afterwards broke out into a civil war, and issued in such fatal extremities, the puritans formed but a small part. The majority of the number consisted of persons attached to the established church, but who felt indignant at the oppression* of the puritans and the cruelties of Laud. Their attachment to liberty taught them to identify themselves with the sufferers, and to discover in the severities of the star-chamber and the high commission court, an exertion of an arbitrary power utterly incompatible with the security of a free people.

Although many causes, it must be confessed, contributed to the ruin of the unfortunate Charles, no single one had so much influence as that religious intolerance which was so unhappy a feature in his character; as, on the other hand, nothing contributed so much to support the precarious authority of Cromwell, and to produce an artificial calm in the midst of so many raging factions, so many stormy elements, as a general liberty of conscience. This, as is remarked by the celebrated Bishop of Meaux, was the great secret of his policy.

The policy of Charles, instead of making him regarded as the common father of his subjects and the guardian of their welfare, providing for the happiness of every part with parental care and impartial solicitude, made him to become the head of a party, while he lent himself as the instrument of gratifying its mean and sanguinary passions; by which means he became the idol of a faction, but lost the hearts of his people. The policy of Cromwell mitigated resentment, conciliated prejudice, and made those acquiesce in his pretensions and concur to maintain his authority, who agreed in nothing else. How precious must that liberty of conscience be, and how fearful the resentment of its loss, which could prompt a great people to suffer their native prince to wander in exile, and subsist on the alms of rival courts; and reconcile them to the yoke of a master whose power was not supported by the smallest shadow

* Clarendon, vol. i. 184.

of justice! If such effects followed from invading liberty of conscience at a time when its right had never been ascertained, what may we not apprehend from its violation after an uninterrupted possession of it for a hundred years? when it has become familiar to our laws, habits, and manners, and the apprehension of its danger has been succeeded by an experience of its advantages. What will be the ultimate issue, should Providence in its infinite wisdom suffer our adversaries to prevail, and the cruelties of persecution to be renewed, it belongs not to me to conjecture: but it may be granted me to express my humble hope that we shall stand firm in the day of trial; not forgetting, that persecution and sufferings have been the lot of the most eminent of God's servants; that in walking in this path we are encompassed with "a cloud of witnesses;" with apostles, prophets, and evangelists, whose words will teach, whose examples will encourage, us to adorn that cause by our sufferings which we are no longer permitted to aid by our exertions.

Having executed to the best of my ability the plan I proposed, my freedom, I trust, will be pardoned if I suggest a few hints of advice to those who are employed in disseminating the knowledge of christianity in villages.

1. To abstain from political reflection, and from censuring either the constitution of the church or the clergy, is a part of prudence on which I ever would hope it is needless to insist.

2. Though I am convinced that those who attempt to evangelize the poor do not fail to inculcate the morality of the gospel, it may yet be doubted whether this is done with sufficient distinctness and detail. A notion prevails among some, that to preach the gospel includes nothing more than a recital or recapitulation of the peculiar doctrines of christianity. If these are firmly believed and zealously embraced they are ready to suppose the work is done, and that all the virtues of the christian character will follow by necessary consequence. Hence they satisfy themselves with recommending holiness in

general terms, without entering into its particular duties; and this in such a manner as rather to predict it as the result of certain opinions, than to enforce it on the ground of moral obligation; which tends to disjoin faith and virtue by turning all the solicitude of men to the former, while the latter is left to provide for itself, and to make them substitute the agitation of the passions, and the adoption of a speculative creed, in the room of that renovation of heart and life which the Scriptures render necessary.

Some apology, it is true, ought to be made for those who have leaned to this extreme from the circumstances in which they have been placed. Having been called to preach to people who were ignorant of the very first truths of religion, they have supposed it necessary to employ themselves in laying the foundation. On the supposition we were to address an audience that was not acquainted with the primary doctrines, it would be necessary to begin with relating the facts and teaching the doctrines which are the basis of the christian dispensation. The *credenda*, or things to be believed, must necessarily precede the *facienda*, or things to be done. But though things must proceed in this order, no durable separation should be made of the doctrines from the duties of christianity; lest the poeple should acquire a corrupt taste, and, satisfied with their first attainments and impressions, neglect to cultivate that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." When they have been long detained in the elementary doctrines, they are not unfrequently found to acquire a distaste for the practical parts of scripture; an impatience of reproof; a dislike, in short, of every thing but what flatters them with a favourable opinion of their character and their state. Proud, bigoted, disputatious, careless of virtue, tenacious of subtleties, their religion evaporates in opinion, and their supposed conversion is nothing more than an exchange of the vices of the brute for those of the speculator in theological difficulties.

The best method of preventing this fatal abuse of evangelical doctrine is to inculcate, in immediate con-

nexion with it, those virtues of the christian character by which faith must be tried, frequently, distinctly, and fully. Instead of recommending practical religion only in general terms, under the phrase of holiness or any other, let us, in imitation of inspired preachers, explain in what that holiness consists. When John came preaching "repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand," he did not satisfy himself with barren and general abstractions: in reply to the inquiries of those who asked him what they must do, he entered into details, he imparted specific advice, and enjoined specific duties corresponding to the different conditions of men, and their relation to each other in society. Had he contented himself with merely reiterating the command to repent in general terms, as, it is to be feared, is too often the case, his hearers might have mistaken a transient compunction, a vague sensation of uneasiness, for the duty demanded: but by that particularity of application he adopted, the conscience was informed, and the necessity perceived of "bringing forth fruits meet for repentance."

The conscience is not likely to be touched by general declamations on the evil of sin and the beauty of holiness, without delineation of character: they may alarm at first; but, after a while, if they be often asserted merely as general truths, which involve the whole human race, they will supply no materials for self-examination or painful retrospect. They will, in process of time, be regarded as doctrinal points, and pass from the conscience into the creed. He must know little of human nature who perceives not the callousness of the human heart, and the perfect indifference with which it can contemplate the most alarming truths when they are presented in a general abstract form. It is not in this way that religious instruction can be made permanently interesting. It is when particular vices are displayed as they appear in real life, when the arts of self-deception are detected, and the vain excuses by which the sinner palliates his guilt, evades the conviction of conscience, and secures a delusive tranquillity: in a word, it is when the heart is

forced to see in itself the original of what is described by the apostle, and, perceiving that "the secrets of his heart are made manifest, he falls down and confesses that God is amongst us of a truth." The reproof which awakened David from his guilty slumber, and made him weep and tremble, turned, not on the general evil of sin, but on the peculiar circumstances of aggravation attending that which he had committed. The sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost, which produced such decisive effects, was not a general declamation on the evil of sin, but it contained a specific charge against his hearers of having rejected and crucified their Messiah. When Paul was called before Felix, being well acquainted with his character, he adapted his discourse accordingly, and "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come," until "Felix trembled." The delineations of character and the injunctions of scripture on practical points are not couched in general terms; they are diversified and particular; nor can it justly be doubted that the more of individuality, if I may be allowed the expression, our pictures of human nature possess, the more impressive will they become. It is in this department of public instruction there is scope for endless variety; for the highest exertions of intellect, and the richest stores of knowledge.

The doctrines of christianity, though of infinite importance, are yet few and simple, capable of few combinations, and of little variety of illustration; too precise to leave any thing for the understanding to invent; too awful to permit the imagination to embellish. It is not in the statement of christian doctrines, considered in themselves, that experience, talents, and knowledge find scope for their exertion.

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ON THE RIGHT OF WORSHIP.*

Worship consists in the performance of all those external acts, and the observance of all those rites and ceremonies, in which men engage with the professed and sole view of honouring God. It is consequently in a pre-eminent manner the concern of conscience; for, as God is the supreme master and legislator, it is impossible for a conscientious man, in compliance with human injunctions, either to omit any part of that worship which he apprehends God to require, or to perform any which he has forbidden. In worship, the creature has to do only with his Creator. There are, unquestionably, some regards due to God, some expressions of our reverence to him and our dependence upon him, which it is our duty to render; and the duties which have God immediately for their object, must be in their obligation paramount to every other; that is, such that the commands of no human superior can discharge us from it. It remains only to be considered by what criterion these duties are to be ascertained.

Among the different modes of worship which prevail in different countries, and in the same country, to what standard are we to appeal? by what principle is the solution to be made? Either the mere will of the magistrate, or the conscience of the individual, must decide in this case. I say, the *mere* will, because if the promulgation of his will be enforced by arguments and reasons, these arguments are necessarily submitted to the judgement of the subject; and consequently, as far as they are concerned, he is still left to his conscience. But if such a power as this be vested in the magistrate, it is highly necessary to examine the consequences to which it will lead. It will legitimate all the persecutions which the heathen emperors inflicted on the primitive christians as well as the more recent popish cruelties. For from what principle did those persecutions flow, but that the magis-

* This appears to have been written in 1811; the preceding fifty-one pages in 1801, and 1802.

trate possessed a right to determine and prescribe the religion of his subjects, and that a refusal to comply with his authority involved political guilt? The just pretensions of magistracy in this respect are surely equal; nor can any reason be assigned for denying that authority to heathen or popish princes, within their dominions, which will not equally apply to protestant princes.

The dominion of God over his creatures is original, inalienable, and supreme; so that men must be contemplated as the subjects of God, before we consider them as members of a civil community. The formation of states, and the enaction of laws, are operations which regard man in his transient and local situation as the inhabitant of the present world. There is, on the principles of Theism, above and beyond these, an original and fundamental moral law which unites him to his Maker, and obliges him to fear, serve, and obey him as his superior Lord. That this law is more original and comprehensive than any other, is evident from this consideration, that it comprehends sovereign as well as subjects; that it regards men in those invariable, essential qualities in which they all agree; and that it can never be suspended by time or change.

As men are the creatures of God originally and essentially, and continually accountable to him, whatever laws are established for the government of particular societies, are in the nature of *by-laws*, with relation to the duties which intelligent creatures owe to God; and whenever civil magistrates interfere with these, they are guilty of the same absurdity as a particular corporation would be who formed municipal regulations inconsistent with the law of the land. No particular society has a right to make rules for its regulation which interfere with the general laws of that kingdom of which it is a part; for this would be to introduce an *imperium in imperio*, a multitude of legislatures, and a confusion and uncertainty in the principles of justice.

In like manner no human power can justly make laws which shall interfere with those duties which are previ-

ously due to God. As a necessary consequence of this. it follows, that whatever right men possess to worship God after the dictates of conscience, in a state of nature, is not diminished or impaired by entering into society. If seditious purposes be concealed under the pretext of assembling for religious worship, let the severest laws be enacted for their punishment. Let the claims of liberty of conscience be permitted as a cover for nothing which does not belong to it.

There is less reason, however, for entertaining any alarm on this head in tolerating worshipping assemblies than any other; for they are always public. They invite inspection. Who would be so infatuated as to attempt to connect treasonable or seditious designs with assemblies which are open to every one, and whose time and place of meeting are universally known? Besides, the very business of worship is at the greatest distance possible from every thing tending to inflame political passions. Directed to a spiritual and invisible Being, it withdraws the mind from the world, and turns the thoughts into a channel the most remote from those affections which disturb the repose of society.

It would be strange indeed if those exercises which have the most direct influence in tranquillizing the heart, and reducing all earthly things to comparative insignificance, must be forbidden, from an apprehension of their becoming engines of insurrection and tumult. They cannot be perverted in the smallest degree to this purpose, without their danger being perceived; and it will then be soon enough to apply remedies.

This reasoning does not apply against the magistrate selecting some one particular sect, or some one set of religious opinions, and bringing them under his exclusive patronage and encouragement; in other words the erection of a religious establishment. Whatever the advantages or inconveniences may be which result from religious establishments is foreign to the subject in hand, which regards only the free and full toleration of different sects, as long as they contain themselves within the limits of civil submission.

It will be alleged that on these principles a multitude of ignorant enthusiasts and wild fanatics will start up, and, under the pretence of preaching the gospel, bring religion into contempt, and thence eventually open a door for profaneness and impiety. That this may in some instances be the consequence of unlimited toleration of christian worship, cannot perhaps be denied; as little can it be denied that this is a great evil. It is much to be lamented that any should engage in the functions of a christian minister, who, in addition to an unblemished character, is not possessed of a competent measure of ability. But this inconvenience may be only one instance, among an infinity of others, of a partial evil, connected with a principle productive of the greatest good.

Pure and unmixed good is not the portion of earth. We cannot specify a single law in the natural or moral world, which falls within the sphere of our observation, which is not productive (along with permanent good) of occasional evils. This mixture of partial evil with the source of general happiness, seems to be an essential part of the imperfections of the present state. If the magistrate is invested with the power of suppressing all whom he thinks incompetent to the office of a preacher, there can be no liberty and no tranquillity. But it is surely of more consequence to a state to preserve the most valuable portion of its liberty, than to preserve a perfect exemption from fanaticism. The care of the former falls within the proper province of a magistrate. The latter is consistent with a high degree of national prosperity. Religious enthusiasm becomes dangerous to a state only when it is the subject of oppression. There is in it an elastic quality which repels vigorous coercion. The vivid impressions of religious objects which it includes, rather tend to sink the value of all earthly interests, to annihilate the world and all its concerns, and to produce a conduct which, though it may be wild and incoherent, yet, if left to itself, will be mild, inoffensive, and benevolent. Besides, enthusiasm consisting in a preternatural state of exaltation, has a strong tendency to subside in a

short time, and with the increase of knowledge to purify itself until it settles into calm enlightened piety. It is not, like superstition, a permanent evil. The enthusiast is impatient of control in his religious concerns, but does not aspire after dominion. In proportion as the passions are strongly possessed by invisible objects, the interests of the present state lose their ascendency, and the enraptured enthusiast is more in danger of becoming indolent than factious. The most effectual way of transporting such characters into political excesses, is to inflame them by oppression,—when they naturally learn to consider their enemies as the enemies of God, and throw the whole weight of their religious prejudices and passions into the scale of political opposition; while, on the other hand, a complete toleration is the most effectual remedy for their intemperance; leaving them leisure to reflect, and affording room for the ordinary motives and principles of life to resume their ascendency.

In the history of those sects which have been the most justly branded with enthusiasm, we shall uniformly find that, while they were exasperated by persecution they were fierce and wild, and their fanaticism continued unsubdued; but no sooner were they left unmolested than those features in their character which excited alarm, gradually wore off, and they ceased to be formidable.

The history of the Baptists who rose, in the sixteenth century, in Germany, and of the Quakers in England, confirms the truth of this remark.

Though the tyrannical measures pursued by Charles the First, at the beginning of his reign, naturally excited alarm and awoke opposition, it seems evident the civil war could never have been kindled but for the intolerable cruelties inflicted by Laud on nonconformists, which cemented the various sects, and made them unite in a vehement opposition to the government of Charles, while their tenets were too discordant to permit them to unite in any thing else. The magnitude of eternal interests, and the mighty force of religious passions, were superadded to the causes already existing of political contention, and by their union kindled those flames of war

which consumed the land. Cromwell, on the other hand, whose usurpation was supported by no law, and who had to contend with the whole weight of virtuous prejudice in favour of the constitution he had overturned, and the family he had expelled, practised an opposite policy, and contrived to retain in subjection three kingdoms, by granting to the rival sects a general toleration, and balancing their power against each other. The importance of this expedient in the preservation of his power has been acknowledged, both in England and the continent, by the most inveterate enemies of that extraordinary man. The eloquent Bishop of Meaux, in his funeral oration for Henrietta of France, ascribes his success principally to this measure of his administration. Since the revolution, at which a universal religious toleration took place, amidst all our calamities and reverses, an unexampled duration of domestic peace has been enjoyed, with two very short interruptions from occasions foreign from the topic under present consideration; and during this protracted period, the mild spirit of legislation has communicated itself to all sects, and in a very eminent degree mitigated the acrimony of religious zeal.

A species of religious fanaticism, it is confessed, made its appearance in the sixteenth century in Germany, and in the next century in England, which was of a highly political complexion, and struck immediately at the root of civil power, the distinctions of rank, and the offices of magistracy; but even the history of the Baptists in Germany, and of the Fifth-monarchy men, supplies reasons for toleration, since we see that the obnoxious tenets which distinguished them soon disappeared, and that under milder treatment their successors have retained only some peculiarities of the most harmless kind. The extravagant flights of fanaticism, its visionary spirit, which might tempt its possessors to trample upon the rules of society, can never last long or extend far; for the principles of self-preservation, the physical wants of the lower orders especially, who are most obnoxious to such impressions, the spirit of imitation, the habit of submission to superiors, together with the ordinary occu-

pations of life, are principles of perpetual operation, the influence of which will soon surmount the strongest feelings, which operate only occasionally and by starts, and will consequently force the mind back into its proper element. For the same reasons it can never extend far. Minds only of a peculiar texture will feel its impression. A vast majority of every community will be too wise, too busy, too sensual, or too phlegmatic, to be transported into dangerous excesses by causes which operate on the imagination, and which have no relation to the more ordinary sources of pain and pleasure. No fanaticism of this kind has made its appearance at present, nor is there any room to presume it will. Some degree of enthusiasm, perhaps, generally accompanies religious impressions in uncultivated minds, at their commencement. Enthusiasm may be defined that religious state of mind in which the imagination is unduly heated, and the passions outrun the understanding. But when persons are first deeply impressed with the infinitely momentous concerns of a future life, and are thereby introduced as it were into a new world, it is too much to expect their religious affections shall be perfectly regulated, or their conduct, under circumstances so novel, be consistent with the exactest rules of propriety. New situations, whether resulting from a moral and internal change, or from outward circumstances, make it necessary for some time to pass, before those who are led into them know perfectly how to adjust their behaviour to them. But if the profession of piety be sincere (and of hypocrisy we are not at present speaking) it will eventually secure, together with the essential moral virtues, a regard to decorum and to all the minuter proprieties of social intercourse. In the mean time, where the love of God and man predominates, it will ill become the governor of a christian country, and still less the governor of a christian church, to suffer himself to be so much offended at the intemperate effusions of honest zeal, as to disregard the substance of religion because it may be deficient in some of its more amiable appendages.

If we adopt the maxims of a profane and careless

world, we shall be taught to look upon all zealous christians as enthusiasts or hypocrites; for when have they not, by a majority of mankind, been represented in that light? To men of the world it appears so strange that men should be affected by the consideration of invisible realities in any degree proportioned to the influence of present objects: it is so utterly remote from all their practical estimates; that they have no means of accounting for it without imputing it to a partial insanity or deliberate hypocrisy. But this is only one among numberless glaring inconsistencies of human conduct. For these very persons, it is probable, have never formally renounced the authority of Jesus Christ, who commands us to "seek *first* the kingdom of God," nor the certainty of an eternal state, in comparison of which the interests and prospects of the present are annihilated; and yet they are surprised to find that good and evil should be estimated with regard to their respective magnitude, and that any should be weak enough to credit the declarations and obey the precepts of our common Lord. Such is the fascination of the world, and so complete its triumph in effecting a total divorce of the speculations from the practical belief of professed christians. If the truths which religion reveals, and the hopes it inspires, respect an infinite good, and the present life be, as we know by experience, short and transitory, it must be the truest wisdom to be deeply solicitous to attain that good, and to be disposed to make any sacrifice of present pleasure and convenience with a view to it; and when this is the habitual state of the mind, it will imprint some traces of itself in the external deportment, which the irreligious part of mankind will be sure to brand with the name of hypocrisy or fanaticism.

The primitive christians encountered this reproach. and their successors must expect it in proportion as they tread in their steps. That world to which we are hastening will determine who are justly chargeable with folly; they who treat eternal things according to their true nature, who, making the service of God their supreme concern, pass the time of their sojourning here in fear;

or they, the language of whose conduct is, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

To suppose that that religious state of mind in which devout affections are highly [raised]* is enthusiastic, is a most pernicious mistake, and would in its consequences utterly extirpate religion, and expunge a great part of the Scriptures. The smallest acquaintance with the New Testament must convince every one that the apostles and primitive christians were no strangers to the strongest religious emotions.

We read of a "joy unspeakable and full of glory," of a "peace that passeth all understanding," with innumerable other expressions of a similar kind, which indicate strong and vehement emotions of mind. That the great objects of christianity, called eternity, heaven and hell, are of sufficient magnitude to justify vivid emotions of joy, fear, and love, is indisputable, if it be allowed we have any relation to them; nor is it less certain that religion could never have any powerful influence, if it did not influence through the medium of the affections. All objects which have any permanent influence, influence the conduct in this way. We may possibly be first set in motion by their supposed connexion with our interest; but unless they draw to themselves particular affections, the pursuit soon terminates.

The cool calculation of interest operates only at times; we are habitually borne forward in all parts of our career by specific affections and passions; some more simple and original, others complicated and acquired. In men of a vulgar cast, the grosser appetites, in minds more elevated, the passions of sympathy, taste, ambition, the pleasures of imagination, are the springs of motion. The world triumphs over its votaries by approaching them on the side of their passions; and it does not so much deceive their reason as captivate their heart.

It is in this way the love of the world must be repelled. As it is not chiefly by imposing on the understanding, or

* Whenever a word is placed thus between brackets, it is supplied conjecturally, the manuscript being illegible.—Ed.

misleading the rational assent, that the world triumphs over its votaries, so the mere inculcation of religious truth on the intellect, without forming deep and lasting impressions on the heart, will never be sufficient to emancipate us from its control. The difficulties which accrue in a religious career, especially at its outset, are so many and formidable, that unless we are deeply *interested* as well as convinced, perseverance is impracticable. In that victory over the world which is promised to faith, it is necessary to oppose feeling to feeling, and pleasure to pleasure. The intemperate attachment to sensual pleasure must be subdued by the fear of punishment; the vain and extravagant hopes which present scenes inspire must be effaced by hopes more solid and more animating; and to wean us from the breasts of earthly, we must be led to the breasts of spiritual, consolation.

The world amuses, enchants, transports us; how shall religion teach us to triumph over it, if it present nothing but speculative conclusions, and if the views of a rational self-interest which it displays, were not intimately associated with objects adapted to engage and fill the heart? Would the primitive christians have taken *joyfully* the spoiling of their goods, because they had in heaven a more enduring substance? Would they not only have felt calm and resolute, but accounted "it all joy when they suffered divers persecutions," if the objects of eternity had not occupied a large share of their affections?

The familiar acknowledgement, *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor;* the frequency with which men act contrary to the most mature convictions of reason and conscience, shows how inefficacious is a mere speculative conviction, when opposed to inveterate habits and passions. What is the defect here experienced, but a want of the correspondent feelings and impressions from which that state of desire results which impels to virtuous actions?

As the objects of religion are infinite and eternal, if the mind is duly affected by them at all, they have a tendency to enlarge and propagate their correspondent

affections more and more; and will probably tend ultimately to absorb and extinguish all other hopes and fears.

Though good men are continually approaching nearer and nearer to this state, it is neither possible nor desirable they should reach it in this life. The multitude of pains, difficulties, and perplexities, with which they have to encounter, are continually drawing their attention to present objects; and the duties of the present state could not be performed in that exalted state of spirituality. An eminent degree and vigour of the religious affections, then, ought not to be denominated fanaticism, unless they arise from wrong views of religion, or are so much indulged as to disqualify for the duties of society. Within these limits, the more elevated devotional sentiments are, the more perfect is the character, and the more suited to the destination of a being, who has, indeed, an important part to act here, but who stands on the confines of eternity. He may justly be styled a fanatic, who, under a pretence of spirituality, neglects the proper business of life, or who, from mistaken views of religion, elevates himself to an imaginary superiority to the rules of virtue and morality. Whatever other kind of fanaticism, real or pretended, [exists,] seems not to fall, in the smallest degree, under the conduct of the civil magistrates; nor is there any danger of immorality being inculcated under any corruption of the christian doctrine. Many religious systems, considered in their theory, may seem to tend to the encouragement of vice; they may, in their speculative consequences, set aside the obligations of virtue; but the uncorrupted dictates of conscience, the general sentiments of mankind repecting right and wrong, and the close alliance betwixt devotion and virtue, will always counteract this tendency, so far, that the same persons will be more moral with very erroneous religious opinions, than without religion. A practical disregard to piety is the prolific source of vice. We shall find the minds of every sect of christians, who are zealous in religion, superior to those who are careless and profane. Whatever tends to draw the attention to God and eternity, tends to destroy the dominion of sin.

Under the varied forms of religious belief which have prevailed among the different parties of christians, little variation has taken place in the rule of life. In the first age of christianity, the church was accused, by the malice of its enemies, of the most shameful and unnatural practices; which it disclaimed, but, at the same time, very injudiciously insinuated that the Gnostics were guilty of the crimes which were alleged; but the result of the more calm and dispassionate investigation of later times, has been a growing conviction that these surmises had no foundation in fact. The doctrines of our holy religion may be wofully curtailed and corrupted, and its profession sink into formality; but its moral precepts are so plain and striking, and guarded by such clear and awful sanctions, as to render it impossible it can ever be converted into an active instrument of vice. Let the appeal be made to facts. Look through all the different sects and parties into which professed christians are unhappily divided. Where is there one to be found who has innovated in the rule of life, by substituting vice in place of virtue? The fears entertained from this quarter must be considered as chimerical and unfounded until they are confirmed by the evidence of facts. In those districts in which the dissenters and methodists have been most zealous and successful in village preaching, are the morals of the people more corrupted than in other places? Are they distinguished by a greater degree of profligacy, intemperance, and debauchery, than the inhabitants of other parts of the country? The advocates of rigorous measures will scarcely have the temerity to put the question upon this issue; and until they do, all their pretended dread of the growth of licentiousness from village preaching, will be considered as nothing but artifice.

To contend for the legal monopoly of religious instruction, under pretence of securing the morals of the people, is a similar kind of policy with that of the papists, who withhold the Scriptures, from the common people, lest they should be betrayed into heresy. We all perceive the design of the papist in this restriction is to prevent

the diffusion of knowledge, which would be fatal to ghostly dominion. Is it not equally evident that the prohibition to instruct the populace in the principles of christianity originates in this jealousy of power?

We must, at least, be permitted to express our surprise at the profound sagacity of those who can discover a design to destroy morality by inculcating religion, and a purpose of making men vicious by making them serious. Plain men must be excused if they are startled by such refined and intricate paradoxes.

It highly becomes those who are the advocates for the interference of government to restrain the efforts of methodists and dissenters to diffuse the principles of knowledge and piety, to advert to the consequences which must result.

Those who are conscientious will feel it their duty, in opposition to the mandates of authority, to proceed patiently, enduring whatever punishment the legislature may think proper to inflict. The government, irritated at their supposed criminal obstinacy, will be tempted to enact severer laws accompanied with severer penalties, which the truly conscientious will still think it their duty to brave, imitating the example of the primitive teachers of christianity, who departed from the presence of the council, "rejoicing that they were thought worthy to suffer for the name of Christ." Thus will commence a struggle betwixt the ruling powers and the most upright part of the subjects, which shall first wear each other out, the one by infliction, or the other by endurance; prisons will be crowded, cruel punishments will become familiar, and blood probably will be spilt. The nation will be afflicted with the frightful spectacle of innocent and exemplary characters suffering the utmost vengeance of the law for crimes which the sufferers glory in having committed.

It is an inherent and inseparable inconvenience in persecution that it knows not where to stop. It only aims at first to crush the obnoxious sect; it meets with a sturdy resistance; it then punishes the supposed crime of obstinacy, till at length the original magnitude of the

error is little thought of in the solicitude to maintain the rights of authority. This is illustrated in the letter of Pliny to Trajan,* treating of the persecution of christians. *Their obstinacy* in refusing to comply with the mandates of supreme authority [constituted the crime.] In other penal laws, a proportion is usually observed betwixt the crime and the punishment, the evil and the remedy; but here the pride of dictating and imposing mingles itself, and draws [reasons] for severity even from the insignificance of the error and of the persecuted sect, which should be its protection.

As the power of the community is delegated to the magistrate to enable him to punish such delinquencies, and to avenge such injuries, as it would be unsafe to leave to the resentment of the individual to punish, the voice of law should ever be in harmony with the voice of conscience and of reason. It should punish only those actions which are previously condemned in the tribunal of every man's own breast. The majesty of law, considered as an authoritative rule of action, can only be maintained by its agreement with the simple and unsophisticated decisions of the mind respecting right and wrong. On these principles law is entitled to profound veneration as a sort of secondary morality, or an application of the principles of virtue and social order to the real situation and actual circumstances of mankind. As the civil magistrate is invested with a portion of divine authority for the government of men, so wise legislation is a reservoir of moral regulation and principles drawn from the springs and fountains of eternal justice. When government is thus conducted, it leagues all the virtues on its side; whatever is venerable, whatever is good rallies round the standard of authority; and to support the dignity of the laws is to support virtue itself. In persecution it is directly the opposite. When innocent persons [suffer] for a resolute adherence to the dictates of conscience, the sentiments of moral approbation are necessarily disjoined from the operation of the laws.

* Lib. x. Epis. 97 --Ed.

The fear of civil punishment is a motive which the wisdom of mankind has superadded to the other motives which operate to restrain men from criminal conduct. The contempt and hatred of our fellow-creatures, and the dread of punishment from an invisible Judge, are not always found in fact to be of sufficient force to control the unruly passions of bad men. In addition to this, men have contrived so to organize society, that the disturbers of other men's peace and the invaders of their rights shall have to dread an adequate punishment from the arm of a public person who represents the community. As the fears with which human laws inspire offenders, are superadded motives, they pre-suppose the existence of an original one. They are a superstructure which can only stand on the foundation of those distinctions of right and wrong which the simplest dictates of the understanding recognise. To disjoin the fear of human [laws] from its natural associates, the forfeiture of public esteem, and the dread of divine wrath, is a solecism of the most glaring nature.

Again, the terror of punishment is designed to operate on the community at large, not on a small number of people of a peculiar manner of thinking. But the great body of a people are affected only by what is palpable; they are unable to comprehended subtle and refined reasoning. It is only what is plain and evident that is tangible by their gross conceptions. Admitting, therefore, that the criminality of persisting to follow the dictates of conscience in matters of religion were capable of demonstration, it would remain a very improper object of punishment, because the evidence of its criminality could never be generally understood. The guilt of the sufferer would always be considered as very equivocal; and the sentiments of the community [divided] between the condemnation of the persecuted party and the government. From this will naturally follow two parties in the state, influenced with the most vehement mutual resentment and antipathy; and all the combustible materials already collected are liable to be kindled by the sparks of religious contention. Have not religious

persecutions been almost invariably the harbinger of civil wars, alarming commotions, and awful calamities? Persecution in matters of religion raises up the very hydra it is meant to destroy. The only plausible ground on which it can be defended, is the danger of the state accruing from a diversity of opinion on matters of the first importance, and the necessity, in order to secure public tranquillity, to establish uniformity of opinion. But when persecutions are adopted, the lawfulness of those very measures becomes a subject of contention, as interesting as the dissensions it is designed to terminate.

The question of the claim to liberty of conscience is surely a question of this kind.

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MISCELLANEOUS PIECES.

Written in 1786, or 1787

CHARACTER OF CLEANDER.

[*Written in* 1786.]

"NEC ASPERA TERRENT."

WHOEVER contemplates the various calamities that fill the world, and the still more numerous avenues by which we are exposed to distress, will be affected with a sense of the misery of man. In this survey, we need not search for remote and distant evils; we need not crowd our imagination with the horrors of war, the progress of armies, or the desolation of states. In the most familiar walks of life we meet with scenes at which humanity must bleed: scenes of distress lie open on every side: every quarter is filled with the groans of the dying, and lamentations for the dead. In the mass of mankind we can scarcely select an individual in whose bosom there do not rankle unpublished griefs; and, could we look into the hearts of the most tranquil, we should often find them a prey to unpitied regrets, torn with anxiety, and bleeding with disappointments.

Retiring from this melancholy spectacle, without looking any further, we might be ready to consider the world as a great nursery of disease, a vast receptacle of miseries, filled with beings whom Providence has endowed with sensibility to suffer, rather than capacities to enjoy; but to him who views the moral influence of afflictions, the evils they are intended to correct, and the benefits they impart, they will appear in a very different light; he will consider them as at once the punishments of vice, and the cure of it. Sorrow is, indeed, the offspring of guilt, but the parent of wisdom. Stern in her

aspect, and severe in her deportment, she is, however, sent on a message of mercy. She is destined to follow in the footsteps of intemperance, to break her enchantments, to expose her delusions, and to deliver from thraldom such as are entangled in her snares, or are sleeping in her arms. Whoever surveys the course of his past life, with a view to remark the false steps he has taken in it, will find that, as they have been preceded by indiscretion, they have been recalled by distress. To every object our attachment is proportioned to the pleasures we have received, or expect to receive, from it; and the passion will continue to be cherished as long as the recollection of it calls up ideas of pleasure rather than of pain. Now, every vicious pursuit is founded on indulgence, and disguised by inclination. To the licentious and abandoned, therefore, there is no prospect of the termination of their vices, till, by actual experience of the miseries they inflict, they convey to the mind more sentiments of aversion than of love.

From the moment that the enchantment is dispelled, the false colours stripped off, they will be regarded as specious deformities and real dangers. Multitudes, who could never be persuaded by the calls of interest, or the voice of conviction, to restrain the licence of their passions, and abandon their criminal pursuits, have been reclaimed by the lash of adversity. The decay of health, the desertion of friends, and the neglect of the world, have not unfrequently softened those hardier spirits, to whom the charms of virtue have been displayed in vain.

Nor is sorrow less effectual in the correction of foibles than in the extinction of vice. Cleander, in other respects a man of virtue and honour, had, from his infancy, accustomed himself to the unbounded indulgence of his tongue. Upon all occasions, he trod on the very brink of decorum, a total stranger to the delicacies of friendship, which generously hides the faults it cannot correct. His ridicule was turned on the imperfections of his friends and his enemies, with indiscriminate severity. The splendour of distinguished virtue, which sets at a distance the reproaches of the world, and

almost sanctifies the blemishes of an illustrious character, exempted no foibles from the scourge of Cleander; but rather quickened his acuteness to remark, and his asperity to expose them, as it furnished a display of his penetration in discovering imperfections, where there appeared to the world nothing but unmingled excellence. It was, indeed, his delight to remark the shades of a brilliant character, and to portray with exactness the secret gradations of excellence by which it fell short of perfection. Yet, in Cleander, this conduct by no means sprang from envy of superior worth, or the malignant desire of degrading every one to his own level. He possessed the magnanimity of a virtuous mind, and disdained to lessen his own inferiority by any other means than that of honest emulation. It had its basis in a taste for ridicule, and the pride of wit. His deportment could not fail to issue in perplexity and distress. His enemies considered him as a kind of beast of prey, a savage of the desert, whom they were authorized to wound by every weapon of offence, some by open defamation, and some by poisoned arrows in the dark. His friends began to look upon him with alienation and distrust, esteeming their character too sacred to be suspended, for the sport of an individual, on the breezy point of levity and wit.

His appearance was a signal for general complaint; and he could scarcely enter into company hoping to enjoy the unmingled pleasures of social converse, but he had innumerable jealousies to allay, and misunderstandings to set right. He was every where received with marks of disgust; met with resentment for which he could not account; and was daily obliquely insulted for careless strokes of satire, of which he retained no recollection. Wherever he turned himself, he found his path was strewed with thorns; and that even they who admired his wit secretly vilified his character, and shrunk from his acquaintance. His peace began to bleed on every side; his reputation was tarnished; his fairest prospects blasted; and Cleander, at length, awakened from his delusions, was convinced, when it was too late,

of a lesson he had often been taught in vain, that the attachments of friendship, and the tranquillity of life, are too valuable to be sacrificed to a blaze of momentary admiration.

A consideration of the benefit of afflictions should teach us to bear them patiently, when they fall to our lot; and to be thankful to heaven for having planted such barriers around us, to restrain the exuberance of our follies and our crimes.

Let these sacred fences be removed; exempt the ambitious from disappointment, and the guilty from remorse; let luxury go unattended with disease, and indiscretion lead into no embarrassments or distresses; our vices would range without control, and the impetuosity of our passions have no bounds; every family would be filled with strife, every nation with carnage, and a deluge of calamities would break in upon us, which would produce more misery in a year than is inflicted by the hand of Providence in a lapse of ages.

A REVERIE.

[*Written in* 1786.]

" Aux peupliers qui bornent mon séjear,
J'avois juré de suspendre ma lyre.
De respirer, d'être heureux sans délire,
D'oser sur tout, être heureux sans l'amour
J'avois juré ; mais je l'ai vu sourire,
Et sur son aile il emporte aujourd'hui
Tous les sermens que j'ai faits contre lui."

Dorat.

ENGLISHED THUS :

' On the tall poplars which surround my cot,
And mark the bound'ries of my humble lot,
Where I so oft of Cupid's power have sang,
I fiercely swore my unstrung lyre to hang :
To breathe in peace—to taste the quiet joy
Of calm contentment, which can never cloy :
But more than all—to banish from my heart
Tormenting love, and its too pleasing smart ;
Thus did I swear—but, listening Cupid smil'd,
And, whilst with his enchantments he beguil'd,
He wafted on his pinions far away
My fruitless oaths, rebellious to his sway."

Ineptus.

After reading some passages in the fourth book of Virgil, in which he paints the distress of Dido, upon her being deserted by Æneas, I could not help revolving in my mind, with a good deal of uneasiness, the miseries of love. My reflections threw me into a Reverie, which presented to my mind an imaginary train of circumstances, which I shall now relate, hoping they may tend to cherish that virtuous sensibility which is the ornament of our nature. My fancy naturally carried me into the

times of heathenish superstition, which I hope will be my apology for mentioning gods and goddesses. I imagined that the power of Love had occasioned general discontent, and that the different orders of men had entered into an agreement to petition Jupiter for her removal.

I thought that at the head of these complainers stood the men of learning and science; they lamented with vehemence the inroads of love, and that it often betrayed them from the paths of knowledge, into perplexity and intrigue. They alleged that it extinguished, in the bosom of the young, all thirst after laudable improvement, and planted in its stead frivolous and tormenting desires. That the pursuit of truth called for a tranquil and serene state of mind; whilst love was constantly attended with tumult and alarm. Whatever turn she takes, said they, she will ever be an enemy to labour; her smiles are too gay, and her disappointments too melancholy, for any serious application. They were grieved to see that so trifling a passion should occupy so much time and attention, and that man, who was formed to contemplate the heavens and the earth, should spend half his life in gaining the good graces of the weaker and more inconsiderable part of his species. I thought I perceived that this turn for love and gallantry gave particular offence to the whole tribe of astronomers and profound philosophers. They saw, with indignation, that many of our youth were more anxious to explain a look than to solve a problem, and that they would often be playing with a fan when they should be handling a quadrant. It infatuates every one, said they, who is so unhappy as to be touched with it. He is often more attentive to every change of countenance in a celebrated beauty than to the phases of the moon; and is more anxious to be acquainted with all her manœuvres than with the motions of the whole planetary system. One in particular affirmed, upon his knowledge, that he had been acquainted with students in anatomy, who looked with more curiosity into the countenance of a young beauty than upon the dissection of a bullock's eye.

Some, who pretended to see much farther than the vulgar, considered every thing relating to love as capricious and visionary. Since we are all formed of the same materials, it seemed to them very unreasonable that a little difference in form and colour should raise such violent commotions. Beauty, they said, was but a superficial covering, and every thing at the bottom was alike. Upon this principle, they looked upon it as the height of philosophy to view with indifference what has always given mankind the greatest pleasure. This humour they carried so far, that they lamented they could not strip nature herself of her delusions, as they termed them, by taking off those agreeable colourings of light and shade which lie upon objects around us, and give them all their richness and beauty. They would have been glad to have turned the creation into a colourless and dreary waste, that they might have wandered up and down, and taken a closer survey of it.

The next class of petitioners, I observed, were the men of business. They set out with remarking that they did not join in the complaints that were made against love upon their own account; for though they had been weak enough, in the younger part of their lives, to fall under its influence, it was many years since they had felt the slightest impression of it. They had in view the welfare of their children, and, this being neither more nor less than their affluence, they were led to consider love chiefly in the light of an expensive passion. Its little tendernesses and endearments appeared to them inexpressibly ridiculous, and they wondered how any body could be foolish enough to spend hours in tattling to women, without thinking to gain a farthing by it. They gave a long list of young men, who had been frugal and industrious, till they were enticed by love to prefer pleasure to profit. They declared that when we take an account of balls and treats, and trinkets of various kinds, with the loss of time inseparably attendant upon them, it was at the peril of a fortune to attempt the heart of a beloved object. I was a good deal amused with the manner in which they treated of love; they

considered it as they would any other commodity, setting a price upon every part of it. They reckon a sigh at a shilling, and, if it chanced to be observed by the person for whom it is intended, it was well even if half-a-guinea cleared the expense of it. A side glance was rated at half as much as a full view; they portioned out all the parts of a beautiful person, and made a valuation of each of them. The same scale was applied to their very attitudes: for the sight of a beautiful woman dancing was accounted a matter of enormous expense; and if she chanced to smile with any degree of complacency upon any one, it was well if he was not ruined; under these impressions, they considered love as the certain forerunner of poverty.

There was one complaint raised against this passion, which I thought had something in it more plausible than any I have yet mentioned; it turned upon the ease with which it makes its approaches upon us, and the impossibility of guarding against its first advances. We have been able, said they, by art to manage the elements, so as in general to prevent any dangerous overflowings of them. We brave the storm in ships, and dive into the sea in bells; but the ingenuity of man has hit upon no contrivance to save us from the influence of love. Could we call it in to amuse a leisure hour, or to relieve the languor of a few tedious moments, and then dismiss it again, it might be esteemed a blessing in a life so barren of enjoyment. But it is an influence that is shed all around us, and pours itself upon us in every corner. It often lies hid betwixt the keys of a harpsichord, and is shaken out with a few touches of the fingers. It flounces in an apron, and is trailed along with a flowing robe. No circumspection can preserve us from it; for it will often steal upon us when we are least upon our guard. It hides itself in a lock, and waves in ringlets of the hair. It will enter by an eye, an ear, a hand, or a foot. A glance and a gaze are sometimes equally fatal.

I was next presented with a scene which I thought as interesting and solemn as can enter into the imagina-

tion of man. This was no other than a view of the whole train of disappointed lovers. At the sight of them, my heart insensibly melted into the most tender compassion. There was an extreme dejection, mingled with a piercing wildness in their looks, that was very affecting. Cheerfulness and serenity, I could easily perceive, they had long been strangers to. Their countenances were overspread with a gloom which appeared to be of long standing, and to be collected there from dark and dismal imaginations. There was at the same time all that kind of animation in their features which betokens troubled thoughts. Their air and manner was altogether singular, and such as marks a spirit at once eager and irresolute. Their step was irregular, and they ever and anon started and looked around them, as though they were alarmed by some secret terror. I was somewhat surprised, in looking through the whole assembly, not to see any one that wept. When they were arrived at the place where they had determined to present their united petitions, I was particularly attentive to observe every thing that passed. Though I listened, I could not learn any thing distinctly. After an interval of profound silence, a murmur of only broken sighs and piercing exclamations was heard through the assembly. I should have mentioned that some of them fell off before they had got to the place of rendezvous. They halted for some time, and continued in a melancholy suspense, whether they should turn back or go forward. They knew not which to prefer, the tranquillity of indifference or the tender distresses of love; at length they inclined to the latter, not having resolution even to wish for the extinction of a passion which mingled itself with the very elements of their existence. "Why," said they, "should we banish from our minds the image of all that is pleasing and delightful, and which, if we could once forget, there would be nothing left in the world worth remembering?" The agitation and anxiety felt upon this occasion, could I lay it fully open to the reader, would form a much more interesting picture than the

deliberations of Cæsar, whether he should pass the Rubicon.

I imagined there were several other distinct bodies of men, who complained to the heavenly powers of the tyranny of love, but, the particulars having in a great measure faded from my memory, the reader must excuse my passing them over in silence. I must not, however, forget to observe, that the number and unanimity of those who presented their petitions on the occasion were such, that they might fairly be considered as representing the sentiments of far the greater part of mankind.

Perhaps Providence never chastises the folly of men more justly than by granting the indulgence of their requests. Upon this occasion, I observed, their wishes were accomplished, and they were relieved from a tyranny of which they had so heavily complained. Upon an appointed day, the Goddess of love took her flight to the higher regions, from which she had descended; her influence was at once withdrawn, and all her enchantments were broken up. I thought nothing could equal the joy that was expressed upon this occasion. The air rung with acclamations, and every man was in haste to congratulate his neighbour on his deliverance from a thraldom which had sunk the spirit and degraded the dignity of the human race. They seemed all to be lightened of a load, and to break forth with fresh vivacity and spirit. Every one imagined he was entering upon quite a new career, and that the world was laid fresh open before him.

I could not help feeling an inward delight in seeing my fellow-creatures made at once so happy. At the same time I was anxious to know what would follow upon this new revolution, and particularly whether it would answer the high expectations that were formed from it. Upon my looking around, I was a witness to appearances which filled me with melancholy and regret. A total change had taken place in the whole train of human affairs, and I observed to my sorrow, the change was every where for the worse. It was melancholy now

to enter into company; for, instead of conversation, enlivened by vivacity and wit, there was nothing heard but a drowsy humming, to the last degree tiresome and insipid. In the social intercourse of men the heart had no place; pleasure, and the desire of pleasing, were equally unknown.

Those whom I had an opportunity of observing, I thought very much resembled the loungers and coxcombs of our day, who, without any view of receiving pleasure, mingle in a crowd, and engage in conversation, not to enjoy time, but to kill it. I now sought in vain for those friendly meetings at which I had often been present, where every one, desirous of adding something to the pleasure of the whole, drew forth the fairest ideas of his mind, and, by the display of tender sentiments, melted the heart and soothed the imagination. With what regret did I recollect those conversation parties in which my heart was wont to be full, and to pour itself forth as we talked ourselves alternately into sadness and into joy!

I had an opportunity of correcting a mistake, into which I had fallen, in imagining that love reached only to courtship and marriage; I saw that it insensibly mingles with our most trifling actions, refining our thoughts, and polishing our manners, when we are least aware of it. The men had now entirely thrown aside that tenderness and gallantry which are the great ornaments of human nature, and are so peculiarly needful to temper and soften the rudeness of masculine strength. Men and women were now placed quite upon a level, so that the harmonious softness of the female voice was drowned in turbulence and noise. The ear was filled, but the heart was left empty. Politeness was exchanged for a tame civility, wit for merriment, and serenity for dulness. I began to think more highly than ever of the fair sex, and regarded them in a new light, as a beautiful mirror lying in the fancy of a lover, for him to dress his thoughts by. People were every where falling a prey to dejection, and complaining of the faintness of human enjoyments, as might well be expected, when the influence of love

was withdrawn from them, which, by inspiring romantic hopes, and romantic fears, keeps the mind always in motion, and makes it run clear and bright. You may be sure nothing could make a more ridiculous appearance than courtship, at a time when women retained their vanity, after they had lost their charms. Such is the force of habit, that you might often see a pretty creature twirling her fan, and playing off her little enchanting airs before her lover, who perhaps sat all that time perfectly insensible, fingering his buttons or picking his teeth. Vanity, I perceived, was a kind of instinct in women, that made them employ the whole artillery of their charms, when they knew they could do no execution. Indeed, their airs appeared so ridiculous now, in the eyes of the men, that they had often much ado to refrain from laughter. The coquettes particularly, in their flutterings to and fro, made as odd a figure as fish which should be frozen around in the very act of swimming. Out of respect to the ladies, however, I would compare them to the Grecian chiefs, who, according to the representation of the poets, carried with them so lively an impression of their former employments, that they would be marshalling their troops, and brandishing their swords, even in the shades below. However, the fair sex were soon relieved from this sort of ridicule. They no longer took any pains to smooth their brow, to soften their features into a smile, or to light up the beam of brightness in their eye. Careless of offending, where they knew they could not please, they became negligent in their persons, and vulgar in their air. I cannot express the regret I felt upon beholding the fairest and most beautiful part of the creation thus thrown into the shade.

I thought I perceived that the fine arts began to languish, the paintings that made their appearance at the time were neither boldly sketched, nor so brightly coloured as those I was wont to survey; they were chiefly confined to still life. I observed, however, that the extinction of love affected poetry still more than painting. It no longer regaled the mind with descriptions of beauty; or softened it with tender distress. Its en-

chantment was entirely dissolved; that enchantment that will carry us from world to world without moving from our seat, will raise a visionary creation around us, will make us to rejoice when there is nothing to rejoice in, and tremble when there is nothing to alarm us. These interesting situations, which awaken the attention, and enchain the mind in solemn suspense, till it breaks forth into agony or rapture, now no longer existed in nature, and were no longer described by the poet; he wrote rather from memory than feeling, for the breath of inspiration had ceased.

Upon this occasion I was not at all surprised at the decline of eloquence. I have often thought love the nurse of sensibility, and that, if it were not cherished by this passion, it would grow cold, and give way to a selfish indifference. My conjecture was now abundantly confirmed; for though I saw many discourses, composed at this time, that were well argued, elegant and correct, they all wanted those essential touches that give language its power of persuading.

One thing a good deal surprised me, and that was to observe that even the profoundest parts of learning were less attended to than ever. I was well aware that few apply themselves closely to study, but with the hope of sometimes displaying their acquisitions to the public; and I had imagined fame was a sufficient recompense for any toil human nature could sustain; but I was surprised to find that, in all great and noble undertakings, the desire of appearing respectable in the eyes of a beloved object was of more consequence than the general admiration of mankind.

These I thought were not the only melancholy consequences that flowed from the departure of love. It may be sufficient, however, to observe in general that human nature was becalmed, and all its finest emotions frozen into a torpid insensibility. The situation of mankind was truly pitiable. Strangers to the delicate pleasures of the heart, every thing around them looked cheerless and barren. Calamity left them nothing to hope and prosperity gave them nothing to enjoy.

I observed that they were now as desirous of bringing back the agency of love as they had been before to exclude it. At length, I imagined that Jupiter was touched with compassion at their unhappy situation, and appointed a day in which love was to revisit the abodes of men. An immense number of people, of all orders and ranks, and of every age and condition, assembled themselves, as you may suppose, to behold the descent of the Goddess, and to hail her approach. The heavens, I thought, glowed as she descended, and so many beauti ful streaks of light glanced along the surface of the sky that they divided it into separate tracts, brightened up every cloud within it, and turned the whole into an aerial landscape. The birds at the same time leaping among the branches, and warbling their sprightliest notes, filled the air with a confused melody of sounds that was inexpressibly delightful. Every thing looked brighter than before, every thing smelled sweeter, and seemed to offer up fresh incense to the Goddess. The face of nature was changed, and the creation seemed to grow new again. My heart glowed with delight. I rejoiced in the renovation of nature, and was revived through my inmost powers. There thrilled through me a delightful sensation of freshness and novelty, similar to what a happy spirit may be supposed to feel when he first enters a new state of existence, and opens his eyes on immortality.

I thought I had but a very confused idea of the person of the Goddess herself; for her raiment was so full of light and lustre that I could scarcely take a steady view of her. I observed, however, that her complexion was rather too glowing, and the motions of her eye too piercing and fiery for perfect feminine beauty. Her beauty, I thought, was too raised, and had too much glory in it, to be entirely attractive. I was very much astonished to observe that whoever she glanced her eye upon immediately fell under the influence of the passion over which she presided. It was a very singular sight, to see a whole assembly, one after another, falling into love; and I was much entertained in observing the

change it occasioned in the looks of each of them, according to their different temper and constitution. Some appeared wild and piercing, others dejected and melancholy. The features of several glowed with admiration, whilst others looked down with a timid and bashful respect. A trait of affectation was plainly to be discerned in all of them, as might well be expected from a passion the very first effect of which is to make one lose the possession of one's self. Several ladies in particular, seemingly careless and gay, were whispering to those who stood next them, and assuming airs of particular vivacity, whilst you might easily see their countenance was chequered with anxiety, lest they should chance not to please those upon whom they had fixed their affections. The greater part of the fair sex, however, I observed, smiled with an ineffable sweetness, nor could any thing appear more lovely than their features, upon which there was imprinted a tender reserve, mingled with modest complacency and desire. I imagined that after the Goddess had thoroughly surveyed the assembly, and they had seated themselves into some degree of composure, she thus addressed them :—

" Ye children of men, ye abound in the gifts of Providence, and many are the favours heaven has bestowed upon you. The earth teems with bounty, pouring forth the necessaries of life and the refinements of luxury. The sea refreshes you with its breeze, and carries you to distant shores upon its bosom ; it links nation to nation in the bonds of mutual advantage, and transfers to every climate the blessings of all. To the sun you are indebted for the splendour of the day, and the grateful return of season ; it is he who guides you, as you wander through the trackless wilderness of space, lights up the beauties of Nature around you, and makes her break forth into fruitfulness and joy. But, know that these, though delightful, are not the pleasures of the heart. They will not heal the wounds of fortune ; they will not enchant solitude, or suspend the feeling of pain. Know that I only am Mistress of the Soul. To me it belongs to impart agony and rapture. Hope and despair, terror

and delight, walk in my train. My power extends over time itself, as well as over all sublunary beings. It can turn ages into moments, and moments into ages. Lament not the dispensations of Providence, amongst which the bestowment of my influence is one. He who feels it may not be happy; but he who is a stranger to it must be miserable.'

AN

ESSAY ON POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY.

[*Written in* 1787.]

It has been observed that it seldom falls to the share of one man to be both a philosopher and a poet. These two characters, in their full extent, may be said to divide betwixt them the whole empire of genius; for all the productions of the human mind fall naturally under two heads—works of imagination, and works of reason. There are indeed several kinds of composition which, to be perfect, must partake of both. In our most celebrated historians, for instance, we meet with a just mixture of the penetration that distinguishes the philosopher and the ardour of the poet; still their departments are very wide of each other, and a small degree of attention will be sufficient to show why it is so extremely difficult to unite, in any high degree, the excellence of each. The end of the poet is to give delight to his reader, which he attempts by addressing his fancy, and moving his sensibility; the philosopher purposes merely to instruct, and therefore thinks it enough, if he presents his thoughts in that order which will render them the most perspicuous, and seems best adapted to gain the attention. Their views demand, therefore, a very different procedure. All that passes under the eye of the poet, he surveys in one particular view; every form and image under which he presents it to the fancy are descriptive of its effects. He delights to paint every object in motion, that he may raise a similar agitation in the bosom of the reader. But the calm deliberate thinker,

on the contrary, makes it his chief endeavour to seek out the remoter causes and principles which give birth to these appearances.

It is the highest exertion of a philosopher to strip off the false colours that serve to disguise, to remove every particular which fancy or folly have combined, and present to view the simple and naked truth. But the poet, who addresses the imagination and the heart, neglects no circumstance, however fanciful, which may serve to attach his descriptions more closely to the human mind. In describing the awful appearances of nature, he gladly avails himself of those magic terrors with which ignorance and superstition have surrounded them; for, though the light of reason dispels these shades, they answer the highest purpose of the poet, in awakening the passions. It is the delight of poetry to combine and associate; of philosophy, to separate and distinguish. The one resembles a skilful anatomist, who lays open every thing that occurs, and examines the smallest particulars of its make; the other a judicious painter, who conceals what would offend the eye, and embellishes every subject he undertakes to represent: the same object, therefore, which has engaged the investigating powers of the philosopher, takes a very different appearance from the forming hand of the poet, who adds every grace of colouring, and artfully hides the nakedness of the inward structure, under all the agreeable foldings of elegance and beauty. In philosophical discussions, the end of which is to explain, every part ought to be unfolded with the most lucid perspicuity. But works of imagination never exert a more powerful influence than when the author has contrived to throw over them a shade of darkness and doubt. The reason of this is obvious; the evils we but imperfectly discern seem to bid defiance to caution; they affect the mind with a fearful anxiety, and, by presenting no limits, the imagination easily conceives them boundless. These species of composition differ still further with respect to the situation of mind requisite to produce them. Poetry is the offspring of a mind heated to an uncommon degree; it is a kind of spirit thrown off in the effervescence of

the agitated feeling. But the utmost calmness and composure are essential to philosophical inquiry: novelty, surprise, and astonishment, kindle in the bosom the fire of poetry; whilst philosophy is reared up by cool and long-continued efforts. There is one circumstance relating to this kind of composition too material to be omitted. In every nation it has been found that poetry is of much earlier date than any other production of the human mind. As in the individual, the imagination and passions are more vigorous in youth, which in mature age subside, and give way to thought and reflection.

Something similar to this seems to characterize that genius which distinguishes the different periods of society. The most admired poems have been the offspring of uncultivated ages. Pure poetry consists of the descriptions of nature, and the display of the passions; to each of which a rude state of society is better adapted than one more polished. They who live in that early period in which art has not alleviated the calamities of life, are forced to feel their dependence upon nature. Her appearances are ever open to their view, and therefore strongly imprinted on their fancy. They shrink at the approach of a storm, and mark with anxious attention every variation of the sky. The change of seasons, cloud or sunshine, serenity and tempest, are to them real sources of sorrow and of joy; and we need not, therefore, wonder they should describe with energy what they feel with so much force. But it is one chief advantage of civilization that, by enabling us in some measure to control nature, we become less subject to its influence. It opens many new sources of enjoyment. In this situation, the gay and the cheerful can always mingle in company, whilst the diffusion of knowledge opens to the studious a new world, over which the whirlwind and the blast can exert no influence. The face of nature gradually retires from view, and those who attempt to describe it often content themselves with copying from books, whereby their descriptions want the freshness and glow of original observation: like the image of an object reflected through various mediums, each of which varies

somewhat of its form, and lessens its splendour. The poetry of uncivilized nations has, therefore, often excelled the productions of a more refined people, in elevation and pathos. Accustomed to survey nature only in her general form, and grander movements, their descriptions cannot fail of carrying with them an air of greatness and sublimity. They paint scenes which every one has felt, and which therefore need only to be presented to awaken a similar feeling again. For a while, they delight us with the vastness of their conceptions; but the want of various embellishments, and the frequent recurrence of the same images, soon fatigues the attention, and their poetry may be compared to the world of waters, which fills us with amazement, but upon which we gaze for a moment, and then turn away our eyes. It is the advantage of enlightened nations that their superior knowledge enables them to supply greater variety, and to render poetry more copious. They allure with an agreeable succession of images. They do not weary with uniformity, or overpower us with the continuance of any one exertion; but, by perpetually shifting the scene, they keep us in a constant hurry of delight.

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The form of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."
Shakspeare's Midsummer-Night's Dream.

I cannot help observing that poetical genius seems capable of much greater variety than talents for philosophizing. The power of thinking and reasoning is a simple energy, which exerts itself in all men nearly in the same manner; indeed, the chief varieties that have been observed in it may be traced to two—a capacity of abstract and mathematical reasoning, and a talent for collecting facts and making observations; these qualities of mind, blended in various proportions, will, for the most part, account for any peculiarities attending men's modes of thinking. But the ingredients that constitute

a poet are far more various and complicated. A poet is, in a high degree, under the influence of the imagination and passions, principles of mind very various and extensive. Whatever is complicated is capable of much greater variety, and will be extremely more diversified in its form, than that which is more simple. In this case, every ingredient is a source of variety; and, by being mingled in the composition in a greater or less degree, may give an original cast to the whole.

To explain the particular causes which vary the direction of the fancy in different men, would, perhaps, be no easy task. We are led, it may be at first through accident, to the survey of one class of objects; this calls up a particular train of thinking, which we afterwards freely indulge; it easily finds access to the mind upon all occasions; the slightest actions serve to suggest it. It is nursed by habit, and reared up with attention, till it gradually swells to a torrent, which bears away every obstacle, and awakens in the mind the consciousness of peculiar powers. Such sensations eagerly impel to a particular purpose, and are sufficient to give to composition a distinct and determinate character.

Poetical genius is likewise much under the influence of the passions. The pleased and the splenetic, the serious and the gay, survey nature with very different eyes. That elevation of fancy which, with a melancholy turn, will produce scenes of gloomy grandeur and awful solemnity, will lead another, of a cheerful complexion, to delight, by presenting images of splendour and gaiety, and by inspiring gladness and joy. To these, and other similar causes, may be traced that boundless variety which diversifies the works of imagination, and which is so great, that I have thought the perusal of fine authors is like traversing the different regions of the earth. Some glow with a pleasant and refreshing warmth, whilst others kindle with a fierce and fiery heat: in one we meet with scenes of elegance and art, all is correct and regular, and a thousand beautiful objects spread their colours to the eye, and regale the senses; in another, we behold nature in an unadorned majestic simplicity,

scouring the plain with the tempest, sitting upon a rock, or walking upon the wings of the wind. Here we meet with a Sterne, who fans us with the softest delicacies; and there with a Rousseau, who hurries us along in whirlwind and tempest. Hence that delightful succession of emotions which are felt in the bosom of sensibility. We feel the empire of genius, we imbibe the impression, and the mind resembles an enchanted mansion, which, at the touch of some superior hand, at one time brightens into beauty, and at another darkens into horror. Even where the talents of men approach most nearly, an attentive eye will ever remark some small shades of difference, sufficient to distinguish them. Perhaps few authors have been distinguished by more similar features of character than Homer and Milton. That vastness of thought which fills the imagination, and that sensibility of spirit which renders every circumstance interesting, are the qualities of both: but Milton is the most sublime, and Homer the most picturesque. Homer lived in an early age, before knowledge was much advanced; he would derive little from any acquired abilities, and therefore may be styled the poet of nature. To this source, perhaps, we may trace the principal difference betwixt Homer and Milton. The Grecian poet was left to the movements of his own mind, and to the full influence of that variety of passions which are common to all: his conceptions are therefore distinguished by their simplicity and force. In Milton, who was skilled in almost every department of science, learning seems sometimes to have shaded the splendour of genius.

No epic poet excites emotions so fervid as Homer, or possesses so much fire; but in point of sublimity he cannot be compared to Milton. I rather think the Greek poet has been thought to excel in this quality more than he really does, for want of a proper conception of its effects. When the perusal of an author raises us above our usual tone of mind, we immediately ascribe those sensations to the sublime, without considering whether they light on the imagination or the feelings; whether they elevate the fancy, or only fire the passions.

The sublime has for its object the imagination only, and its influence is not so much to occasion any fervour of feeling, as the calmness of fixed astonishment. If we consider the sublime as thus distinguished from every other quality, Milton will appear to possess it in an unrivalled degree; and here indeed lies the secret of his power. The perusal of Homer inspires us with an ardent sensibility; Milton with the stillness of surprise. The one fills and delights the mind with the confluence of various emotions; the other amazes with the vastness of his ideas. The movements of Milton's mind are steady and progressive: he carries the fancy through successive stages of elevation, and gradually increases the heat by adding fuel to the fire.

The flights of Homer are more sudden and transitory. Milton, whose mind was enlightened by science, appears the most comprehensive; he shows more acuteness in his reflections, and more sublimity of thought. Homer, who lived more with men, and had perhaps a deeper tincture of the human passions, is by far the most vehement and picturesque. To the view of Milton, the wide scenes of the universe seem to have been thrown open, which he regards with a cool and comprehensive survey, little agitated, and superior to those emotions which affect inferior mortals. Homer, when he rises the highest, goes not beyond the bounds of human nature; he still connects his descriptions with human passions, and, though his ideas have less sublimity, they have more fire. The appetite for greatness—that appetite which always grasps at more than it can contain, is never so fully satisfied as in the perusal of "Paradise Lost." In following Milton, we grow familiar with new worlds, we traverse the immensities of space, wandering in amazement, and finding no bounds. Homer confines the mind to a narrower circle, but that circle he brings nearer to the eye; he fills it with a quicker succession of objects, and makes it the scene of more interesting action

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Printed by J. Haddon, Castle Street, Finsbury.